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CENTENARY OF THE SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY.

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.

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CENTENARY HISTORY

OF THE

SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY

CENTENARY HISTORY

OF THE

SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY

BASED ON FOUR DISCOURSES GIVEN IN THE CHAPEL IN MAY AND JUNE, 1893

BY

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.

WITH APPENDIX

CONTAINING AN ADDRESS BY MR. FOX, IN 1842
AN ORIGINAL POEM BY MRS. ADAMS, 1836
AND
A DISCOURSE BY MR. CONWAY, 1893

LONDON
WILLIAMS AND NORGATE
AND AT EDINBURGH
1894

12-4-37

PREFACE

WHILE such imposing centenarian recollections cluster about this year (1893), it may seem rather bold for a single Religious Society to invite attention to its hundred years of labour and vicissitude. And indeed the Author's original intention contemplated no more than one historical discourse, which might, perhaps, form a pamphlet useful to the Society and its friends, who dwell in different regions. But the field was new, and with farther exploration the discourses, despite all compression, extended to four; and since their delivery the work of revision, entailing new inquiries, has so modified and enlarged the original discourses that they may hardly be recognised by those who heard them. This growth of the investigation to the dignity of a small volume followed the Author's increasing impression that the Society's unrecorded story, as dug out of its manuscript archives, from old magazines and pamphlets, and

the memories of aged persons, might fairly claim the interest of a larger public. The historic sense cannot fail to recognise the picturesque, and to some extent representative, relation of the Society to the tremendous events amid which it was born, and find in its conservative radicalism, unbroken by any incitement of violence or iconoclastic insanity, maintenance, in its modest sphere, of the healthier traditions of English progress. From the victorious American Revolution came the torch that kindled the Revolution in Europe; from it also came the lamp which an American, who in youth had seen General Washington besieging Boston, brought to the little chapel in London, where it still burned, after the revolutionary torch was quenched in blood, and through the night of Liberty's despair, till the morning stars sang again.

But it would be a mistake to suppose that in the wayfarer from New England, Elhanan Winchester, or in those who with him founded the Society, there was any consciousness of their relationship to the revolutionary era. They were Scriptural enthusiasts of a new gospel—the ultimate salvation of all mankind in a future world. In France, maddened by the invading league of despots, hurling at them the head of a king, Elhanan Winchester heard only the

apocalyptic trumpet, and recognised its prophesied "Woes." Yet in their doctrine of universal redemption there was an essential spirit and force of humanity which, after the pattern of a new heaven, must inevitably shape the vision of a new earth. Even from a world whose millennial consummation seemed at hand, our London "Philadelphians," as they called themselves, wished to clear away African slavery, and inhuman punishments, and penal statutes against religious liberty. Even amid their raptures, in view of a celestial paradise enjoyed by all, began unconsciously their pilgrimage from the world to come to that which now is.

But these generalizations, here written after my work is printed, find little place in it. The occasion has appeared to me one rather for the recovery of interesting details, illustrating the interior life of an unorthodox Society of educated people, animated by a comprehensive principle of religious liberty, at successive stages of struggle and progress; and also casting some fresh light on individual characters, and on their services to each just cause as it arose, and each new truth. This appears to me the most important contribution that the South Place archives can make to the yet unwritten religious history of England. And though the contribution is so brief,

an outline filled in with sketches and anecdotes, those interested in the study will find the work to some extent an index to a considerable literature which really grew out of the Society, but is cherished by all cultured readers without any such association. In this lies the immediate honour of this old Society. It was in its origin made up of the waifs and strays of many sects, united only by an enthusiasm for the Universal Love which consumed sectarianism; it has steadily remained unsectarian; it has never possessed any denominational trade-mark to stamp on its own productions. The story now briefly told is that of a religious Society founded at a time of extreme degeneration, when government mainly consisted in "lynching" the Liberals, burning in effigy the author of the "Rights of Man," and imprisoning those who circulated such works; when Edmund Burke was insisting on the penal statutes for even moderate religious heresies; when Charles James Fox declared the English Constitution cut up by the roots, and obedience to such "despotism" no longer "a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence": of a Society which, animated by a devout enthusiasm of humanity, did steadfastly, and by purely moral and intellectual weapons, maintain, under four

successive English monarchs, against a persistent defence, principles that are now the air we breathe. Its own interests as a Society were subordinated to the rights of those whose views it did not share, mainly indeed its antagonists—Catholics, Jews, Deists, Atheists. And during that long period, from the English Reign of Terror to the Restoration of the Constitution, these gentlemen and ladies of the Society lived fairly happy lives, in active co-operation with charitable and practical enterprises of the community, in close relationship with the literary and artistic world around them. In Harriet Martineau's little tale, "Five Years of Youth, or Sense and Sentiment," whose characters are Benjamin Flower and his family; in letters and writings of Hazlitt, Carlyle, Mill, Leigh Hunt, and Browning—to mention only some of Mr. Fox's circle—glimpses are given into the intimate life of this Society which long represented the various culture of the world, while faithfully working for its political and social improvement. Its history, therefore, belongs not to South Place only, but to the general world.

In gathering the history from many sources, not aided much by any book, I have spared myself, and indeed my friends, no pains to secure accuracy. I owe especial gratitude to Mrs. Eliza Bridell Fox

(daughter of the Society's most eminent minister) for her generous and unwearied assistance. No doubt faults and errors will be discovered in the volume, but none, I feel assured, which can affect the substantial correctness of the narrative, or defeat its genuine intention to present the facts as they really are, and to describe persons and events truly. The present minister of the South Place Society claims no literal continuity with the particular doctrines of his predecessors, though he believes that their spirit has animated the changes it has undergone. Under its successive names, adopted or given—"Philadelphians," "Universalists," "Society of Religious Dissenters," "South Place Unitarian Society," "The South Place Society," "The Free Religious Society," "The South Place Ethical Society"—is traceable a constant endeavour to study carefully, and keep abreast of, the growing knowledge of the world, at whatever cost to traditional prejudices or opinions; to do this in a spirit of tolerance no less than of sincerity. Whether the Society, under its present minister, is adequately representing these traditions, and fulfilling its spiritual trust, must be left to the verdict of others. But it may be confidently claimed that the Centenary of our Society finds its fundamental principles triumphant, its

freedom established, and the humanity for which it pleaded in times of oppression risen to be the concern of all religious organisations. As our Society grew from no theological creed, and has never adopted any opinion that could fetter its members, the religious or philosophical theories taught in it must necessarily vary with the teachers it employs; but beneath these variations there has been steadily developed the spirit of a human religion: potential in its first minister's Universalism, it now prevails in the benevolent, educational, and artistic efforts which during the week extend the services of the Society to large numbers who have no connection with it as a Chapel, and no knowledge of its religious teachings. The Society possesses indeed no machinery of propagandism for any peculiar tenets. For those who knock, its doors are open.

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CENTENARY DISCOURSES

I

Our Society reaches this year the centenary of its foundation, and our Chapel its period of threescore years and ten. The Society was founded by an American, and to an American it now falls to do homage to that early apostle of the larger hope. And a grateful opportunity it is; for that pioneer, Elhanan Winchester, was a true forerunner of Channing, Emerson, and Theodore Parker, in America, and of William Johnson Fox in England. In laying the foundation-stone of this chapel Mr. Fox invoked the spirit of Winchester. Born (September 30, 1751) near Boston, Massachusetts, eldest son of a mechanic who named his fifteen children out of the Bible (boys out of the Old, girls out of the New Testament), and brought them up as solemn citizens of ancient Judea, Elhanan was given only a fair common school education, and taught himself Hebrew, Greek,

Latin and French. He was old at twenty, became a rigid Calvinist preacher, summoning the elect—the already saved—but offering no hope to the rest of mankind. In his travels he casually met a young lady, who answered that all must be saved; she "beheld an infinite fulness in Christ for all mankind." He interrupted her with denials and texts, silenced her, passed on his way; but her one sentence carried his destiny with it. He never saw her again, he never knew her name or abode; he carried to the end of life a hurt that he could not tell her that he had discovered his error and her truth. Her soft word, a little seed cast on Puritan rock, took root, crumbled the rock into a robust tree of faith (of course called heresy), whose fruitful slips were planted in various parts of America and England. One of those slips is represented in the hundred years of this Society; the seed of it was planted by a maiden in the depths of New England, four generations ago. She lived and died in her little sphere, dreaming not that the still small voice of her spirit would be heard in distant lands, would animate leaders of men; or that her heart, a century after it ceased to beat, would be reminding other lonely hearts, as this day, of the immeasurable influence of the true word spoken in fit season, amid whatever weakness and obscurity.

Elhanan (signifying "God-given") made good his name. It is said (2 Samuel xxi.) Elhanan slew the giant Goliath, "whose spear was like a weaver's beam." In another place the feat is ascribed to David, but we will claim it for Elhanan. A weaver's beam was small compared with the spear of Calvinism which our Boston Elhanan encountered. He carried to the combat one brief text, "God is Love": with the divine Love his heart was aflame, his brain inspired; and he went through his own country and then through England, publishing the new gospel, that all mankind would be ultimately saved. The ranters and revivalists raged against a doctrine ruinous to their whole stock—terrorism. Huntington S.S.—Sinner Saved—printed his "Advocates for Devils refuted." It was a common belief, even among Unitarians, that it might be dangerous to mitigate the fears of mankind, and for other reasons they hardly ventured sympathy with Winchester. When he came to England (1787) no Unitarian assembly heard his eloquent voice. Unitarianism was still under penal laws, and, though they were not enforced, those ministers had to be cautious. These laws had not anticipated Universalism, and Winchester did not assume anti-Trinitarian ground. But in private the American was well received by Priestley, Price, and some others.

He also met John Wesley, then in extreme age, and good evidence is given in Winchester's biography that Wesley strongly inclined to the Universalist doctrine.* The biography (a sort of Universalist tract) is in the British Museum Library, and contains a portrait, showing Winchester to have been a commanding kind of man, something like Washington, who once wrote him a friendly letter. He had been the leading Baptist preacher in Philadelphia, but lost his place by adopting Universalism. He reached London, September 21, 1787, and preached in Blackfields (Southwark); in Moorfields; in a schoolroom in Store Street (Tottenham Court Road); at "Mr. Thwait's chapel, Southwark"; and for a year in Petticoat Lane, where the Baptists met in an ancient church, originally Catholic. Next he had a connection with Glasshouse Yard Chapel (whose foundations are traceable under a paper-hanging factory); and in the evenings he preached at a Baptist Chapel in Worship Street, which afterwards became Unitarian.

Winchester had an enormous capacity of belief. His first publication in London was the "Visions" of an old Frenchman, whom he knew in Pennsylvania,

* It is said, the authority not being given, that Wesley left a "testimony" on this subject to be printed after his death; but he still remains represented by his sermon, "The Eternity of Hell Torments." Winchester's biography is by E. M. Stone (1836).

and who in a trance of forty-one hours had visited the Abodes of Misery and Happiness, conversed with Adam, and learned, as Swedenborg did, that all the suffering souls would at last be delivered. The pamphlet was sold at his house, No. 4 Winksworth's Buildings, and at Glasshouse Yard Chapel, for the benefit of a poor widow. He was a rhapsodist. He versified the entire hundred and fifty psalms, and wrote 237 hymns, which were sung in his chapels; also a poem on "The Process and Empire of Christ," in twelve books, that never saw the light. He was a millennial enthusiast. He published two sermons on "The Three Woe-Trumpets" of Revelations, in which he had no difficulty in identifying the French Revolution, just opening, with the Second Woe. He was not much interested by Wesley's preaching, but loved the man. John Wesley died March 2, 1791, and on the 10th, the day after his burial, Winchester preached a funeral sermon in his honour. It appears that there was much hatred against the aged Wesley (he died in his 88th year), who was declared to have certainly "passed into the lake of fire."

"These uncharitable revilers of the pious dead," said Winchester, "have yet their religion to seek. It is no great breach of charity to say that their temper shows whose children they are. But in vain have they

attempted to intimidate me, and prevent me from speaking in favour of this venerable servant of Christ, whose blessed memory they would wish to load with most bitter, false, and malicious accusations."

In a footnote he quotes an intimidating letter written him by one E. Tomlinson, declaring John Wesley "a bad character." Outside of Wesley's own connection, the only memorial service in his honour that I have discovered was that of the founder of this Society, who also published an Elegy on Wesley.

On the 12th of October 1792, the tercentenary of Columbus' landing in the New World, Winchester delivered an oration, apparently by request of his countrymen in London. It was printed along with a biographical sketch of George Washington, and also a descriptive plan of the unbuilt city of Washington. The oration concludes with a glowing prophecy:

"I look through and beyond every yet peopled region of the New World, and behold period still brightening upon period. Where one contiguous depth of gloomy wilderness now shuts out even the beams of day, I see new states and empires, new seats of wisdom and knowledge, new religious domes, spreading around. In places now untrod by any but savage beasts, or men as savage as they, I hear the voice of happy labour, and behold beautiful cities rising to view. Lo, in this happy picture,

I behold the native Indian exulting in the works of peace and civilisation. . . . . I hear the praises of my Creator sung upon the banks of those rivers unknown so long. Behold the delightful prospect! See the silver and gold of America employed in the service of the Lord of the whole earth! See slavery, with all its train of attendant evils, abolished! See a communication opened through the whole continent, from North to South, and from East to West, through a most fruitful country! . . . . O America! land of liberty, peace, and plenty! in thee I drew my first breath, in thee all my kindred dwell. I beheld thee in thy lowest state, crushed down under misfortunes, struggling with poverty, war, and disgrace; I have lived to behold thee free and independent, rising to glory and extensive empire; blessed with all the good things of this life, and a happy prospect of better things to come. I can say, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which thou hast made known to my native land, in the sight and to the astonishment of all the nations of the earth."

The whole oration should be read at Chicago now, though parts of it might be suspected of insertion for the present occasion.

Winchester's congregations outgrew their chapels, they also outgrew some of their Baptist notions. The dissenters of various shades who gathered around the American prophet built or purchased for him the Parliament Court Chapel, Artillery Lane. There our Society was organised, February 14, 1793.

Elhanan's Goliath was Hell; he did not preach Trinitarianism so far as I can find, but never assailed it, and held strictly to the Bible. He wrote an earnest though gentlemanly reply to Thomas Paine, and would have grieved to think that any successor of his would defend Paine's principles. Winchester and his comrades were emerging from a Puritan synagogue less enlightened than the Jewish one now occupying old Parliament Court Chapel. There was more warmth than light in the fire kindled there; a good deal of orthodox smoke surrounded it; but it was the kind of fire that can consume smoke, including its own. Winchester was a youth at Boston when Washington raised an English flag against un-English despotism: he had learned the fate of all tyranny, whether on earth or in heaven; he had never forgotten that gentle protest of the maiden's heart against the vindictiveness he once worshipped. The fire kindled in Parliament Court was from a spark of the great human insurrection against deified inhumanity. They tried hard to carry to the right side Jahve's "Word," and from it make him out a constitutional governor, with unlimited pardoning power and tender mercy. But the potent element was fanned into increasing strength, not only by Winchester's eloquent rapture, but also by the Society's almost emotional harmony.

REV. ELHANAN WINCHESTER.

They had come out of various sects, and brought discordant prejudices; but their old religious fire-sides were lost; they had now to depend on each other; they had each to give up some tradition, or subordinate it, and translate their doctrine of divine love into mutual forbearance and affection. They named the new society "The Philadelphians," that is, "loving brothers," or "brotherly lovers." In the Book of Revelations the Spirit saith to the Church in Philadelphia, "I have set before thee an open door which none can shut;" "the synagogue of Satan shall worship at thy feet;" "because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I will keep thee from the time of trial coming upon the whole world." Such were the visions that shone on the eyes of our Philadelphian fathers in dingy Parliament Court.* Their open door none could shut. A synagogue now sits in their temple, but the synagogue of Satan, the lord of terrors, has surrendered, and Hell is now turned to a comfortable *sheol.*

Winchester wrote to his friend, Dr. Benjamin Rush, in the city of Philadelphia, that in England "many doors are opened [for the doctrine of universal restoration], especially among the Baptists

* The American writer of Winchester's biography, probably misled by the dignity of the chapel's name, says that he preached before the Houses of Parliament.

and Presbyterians." He preached in many towns and cities; he arraigned the slave trade; he denounced capital punishment; he instituted a true Ethical Society. After nearly seven years of such service in England, he was compelled by domestic troubles to return to America (May 1794). It was his religious belief that a preacher, to be "above reproach," must never be without a wife. The fifth Mrs. Winchester, though a Philadelphian geographically, was spiritually the reverse. As there are no descendants, I may say she led him such a life that he resolved to put an ocean between himself and her, arranging for her maintenance. But she became penitent, was forgiven, and joined him in America. The Society entreated his return; but while they awaited his presence, they heard of his death, which occurred at Hartford, Connecticut, April 18, 1797.

The memorial service in honour of Elhanan Winchester, in Parliament Court, was long remembered. Amid draped walls, the Rev. William Vidler preached from the text, "He being dead, yet speaketh." In the four hymns written for the occasion by T. A. Fenton, there were verses of exaltation:

> "Oft whilst he spake, our souls would rise,
> And open spread Faith's widest wings,
> And mount and soar above the skies,
> And realise eternal things."

William Vidler, the second minister of our Society, was Winchester's first ministerial convert. He was a stonemason in Battle, Sussex, and incurred the anger of his father (also a stonemason) by inclining to dissent. Miss Sweetingham, whom he afterwards married, persuaded him to hear a sermon from Rev. George Gilbert in her father's house, and this ended in his immersion (1780), and becoming a Baptist preacher in Battle, in his twentieth year. In 1787 he was supporting a wife and five children on a salary of £50, and wrote a pathetic prayer to God for help, which he believed was answered by his call to Northiam, which paid more. In 1784 an entry in his diary discloses doubts concerning the godhead of Christ and the eternity of hell: "At present, I do not doubt the truth of these doctrines as commonly received among the orthodox; but I do intend to consider them both more minutely." In 1792, Elhanan Winchester preached at Battle, and on the last Sunday of that year Mr. Vidler announced his conversion to Universalism. His congregation went with him, and in 1793 they were all formally excommunicated at Chatham, the presiding elder expressing to Vidler, who was present, a wish "that the hell he advocated might be his portion."* After Winchester's

* In 1793, Thomas Paine, author of "The Rights of Man," was burnt in effigy at Battle. The mob stopped at the doors of

departure for America, Vidler was invited to Parliament Court, where his first sermon was given, Feb. 9, 1794. He still preached part of each year at Battle. He held Unitarians in some distrust, for a time, even after he became Unitarian.

Vidler edited (1797–1801) a monthly periodical, "The Universalist Miscellany, or Philanthropist's Museum. Intended chiefly as an Antidote against the Anti-Christian Doctrine of Endless Misery." In the first volume there is a portrait of Mr. Vidler's very thoughtful countenance. Except for the belief concerning hell, he did not then assail orthodoxy, but his magazine shows signs of misgiving concerning the Atonement. He held on to the Trinity until 1802. When he criticised that doctrine as unscriptural, his adherents began to leave him; and the congregation was so reduced that he hardly had any salary at all. Denial of the Trinity cost this Society £320 per annum. He tried to make something by selling books. While the Society was flourishing, the minister had ordered an organ (1801) and not having raised enough to

prominent dissenters, crying "No Paine!" When they shouted at Vidler's door he stepped out and congratulated them on the ingenuity shown in their effigy. They demanded whether he was for Paine. "No, my lads," said he, "be assured I have no liking for *pain;* I am for ease." The mob laughed, gave him three cheers, and passed on.

pay for it, he had pledged his salary for the remainder (£50). But the salary left as Unitarianism entered (from £250 was reduced to £30), and it was only by his disinterested fidelity that the Society was saved from dissolution. Two gentlemen, Wood and Andrews, paid for the organ. By the help of the Rev. Robert Aspland, of the New Gravel Pit Chapel, Hackney, the magazine was revived in 1802, under the title of "The Universal Theological Magazine." The Society marched on bravely, with its invincible and earnest minister.

Curiously enough, the Baptist notion of a "chosen people" survived at Parliament Court the Universalist and Unitarian conversions, holding its traditional exclusiveness at the Communion table. Only in 1808 did our Philadelphians awaken to a perception that their door was not yet wide enough open. On October 6 they resolved "that, instead of the former mode of close communion (so called), an open communion of all the congregation be adopted in future."

Having thus reached the Philadelphian substance, they gave up the name. There had been a Society within the Society, called "the Church," which seems to have communicated at a different time, and to have seceded about the time when the open Communion was adopted. Mr. Vidler's

Society applied for admission to the Assembly of General Baptists, and was admitted by a small majority; but this caused a division in that Assembly, which bears some picturesque resemblance to the division which recently occurred when Mr. Spurgeon denounced Dr. Clifford for lecturing in this place. The Baptist connection lasted long after the Society had become actively associated with the Unitarian body.*

The Society was animated by a missionary spirit, and gave up their minister to preach in other places. In 1812, Mr. Vidler founded the Unitarian Church in Reading, remaining there five months. Among our records is a filial and grateful letter from the Reading Church to Mr. Vidler, saying they are "proud to acknowledge that their very existence as Unitarians was owing to your instrumentality"; and our Society wrote to Reading, saying of Mr. Vidler: "His boldness and the sacrifices he has made in support of the truth as it is in Jesus, will, we trust, be had in everlasting remembrance." Mr. Vidler was interested in public and philanthropic matters, and not theology alone. So early as 1801 he wrote a paragraph in his magazine concerning the neglected subject of cruelty to animals.

* A biographical sketch of Mr. Vidler is given in *The Monthly Repository*, February 1817 (vol. xii.). His wife died Dec. 22, 1808.

"There are," he said, "several species of barbarity in this *Christian* country which reflect dishonour on our national character. Throwing at cocks, we believe, is pretty generally disused since our moral mentor, Addison, so compassionately pleaded their cause in one of the papers of the *Spectator;* but cock-fighting and bull-baiting yet continue; and we fear that the practice of pinning the cockchaffer among children is yet frequent. Parents and tutors of youth ought to discourage everything of the kind; from cruelty to animals the transition is very natural to cruelty to our own species."

He even includes the pleasures of the chase under his ban, a Radicalism on which no one, I believe, had previously ventured.*

The Society sang a great deal. It had begun with Winchester's hymn-book, but in 1810 adopted Aspland's (Unitarian) collection. In 1815, Mr. Smith, the organist (son-in-law of Mr. Vidler), was requested "to introduce such tunes as are adapted to hymns of a particular metre, and to use the same sufficiently frequent to enable the congregation to join in so noble a part of the worship of God." It was also ordered "that the choir be so enclosed as to prevent rude or unruly persons from intruding themselves thereinto."

* He was soft-hearted, and once pawned his watch to help a poor man named Javel, who sometimes appeared in his chapel. But Javel was a footpad, and one night attempted to rob Vidler in Bethnal Green. Later on, Javel was executed at Chelmsford.

Mr. Vidler died August 23, 1816, and "was buried at the Unitarian Chapel at Hackney on the 28th of August, attended by a multitude the most respectable and solemn that can well be conceived." On being offered payment for the ground, the Hackney committee declined it, saying: "They considered it an honour that they should have his ashes deposited with them." There, then, lies the dust of the second minister of this Society, and the protomartyr of its Unitarian foundation—though he throve on persecution. He was a lean, consumptive man when he came to Parliament Court, but became herculean.* His career was altogether admirable. The funeral address of Aspland was published in the *Christian Reformer* (first series, vol. ii.). Its portraiture shows one the true old English character—quiet, simple, humorous; "his bodily make tall and upright; his step regular and firm; and his countenance, open and varying, indicated great courage. As a preacher he excelled chiefly in strength of reasoning, simplicity and perspicuity of

* My friend J. A. Lyon remembers being taken to hear Mr. Vidler, and his dining with his father, two seats being required for him at the table. His parents were much attached to him. It is said that once, when he was driving with Mr. Aspland, a collision occurred, and Mr. Vidler's weight alone kept the carriage from being upset. It is certain that his moral weight kept Parliament Court Chapel from being upset when it came in collision with Trinitarianism.

WILLIAM VIDLER.

style, and an open, manly elocution. His voice was clear and strong, his attitude erect and self-possessed, and his person dignified. He would sometimes indulge in the pulpit in an ironical turn of expression, which produced a striking effect. In prayer he was less happy than in preaching."

Richard Wright declared Vidler "one of the best extempore preachers I ever knew." He was not so good as a writer, but it is difficult now to estimate the writings of men whose art was required to say so much to the point about what is now nothing to the point. Indeed, at every step of these investigations I have felt some pain, along with admiration, at finding great-hearted, scholarly, intellectual men expending their strength, their lives, through long years, in merely clearing away the dogmatic rubbish for the foundation of a rational temple. Elhanan Winchester was even a man of genius, yet no pamphlet of his has now any religious value, so concentrated was he on his then vast discovery that divine punishment is not eternal. William Vidler has left few pages now useful, though some are interesting to those who study the rise and development of ideas. As a specimen of Vidler's ingenious inquiries I quote a passage concerning Judas. Several eminent authors have since vindicated Judas (largely a mythical character), but Vidler is perhaps

the first who ever said a good word for the much-accursed man. Having re-translated the original Greek, showing that Judas did not hang himself, but, "departing, was strangled," he says:

"Being strangled with grief, though not very common, is a circumstance that sometimes happens in cases of extreme and sudden anguish of mind. An instance of it happened in the month of July 1798, on the public theatre in Liverpool. John Palmer, the comedian, playing the character of the *Stranger*, in a comedy of the same name, suddenly fell backward and died upon the floor. No other reason could be given, but that the character of the *Stranger* was so expressive of Mr. Palmer's own distressful situation, that he was overcome by it, and strangled with grief.—[N.B. Mr. Palmer's domestic happiness had been lately ruined.]

"It does not appear that covetousness was the great motive from which Judas betrayed our Lord; for if so, would he have been content with the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver, which is only about three pounds fifteen shillings? Would he not rather have asked a princely sum? And that the rulers would have given it is not to be doubted, for we know they gave large money to hush the soldiers afterwards (Matt. xxviii. 13). . . . . We ought to search for some other principles of action in him. . . . . The Kingdom of Christ is a a spiritual kingdom, and the subjects of it must in the present state be sufferers, and wait by faith for a reward in an administration of his kingdom yet to come. Our Lord often taught this; but his disciples had no ears to hear it. They dreamed of a temporal kingdom, and

ardently expected its honours and profits. Hence they often contended who should be greatest—*i.e.*, who should be prime minister in the kingdom; hence John and James, by the interest of their mother, sought for the two chief places; and hence the indignation of the other disciples when they heard the request of the brothers. Now, only suppose that Judas had the same views of the kingdom as being temporal, and the same ambition to be a great man, we shall then find sufficient motives for his conduct. He had seen the miracles of Jesus, and was highly impressed with a sense of his power; he had often seen his modesty and humility, and, like the kinsman of our Lord, could not reconcile his character of Messiah with his low condition and love of privacy (see John vii. 3, 4). Might he not think that if he could bring that matter into such circumstances as should cause him to avow his character openly, and to take the kingdom, he should even do a good work—that then he should not only be forgiven, but even highly rewarded, as having shown his love to Jesus? . . . . That Judas did not think of any harm to his master is evident, for 'when he saw that he was condemned, he repented himself,' etc. (Matt. xxvii. 3). I do not see but that Judas loved his master as really as Peter, who denied him, or as the other disciples, who forsook him and fled: but being more deeply tinctured with ambition to possess the temporal honours of the kingdom, he fell more deeply than the other disciples did; and seeing the design of his plan frustrated, and the life of his beloved master in danger, he made every reparation which a sincree but mistaken man could make; he avowed the innocence of Jesus, confessed his own guilt, returned the money

with abhorrence; and so great was his grief that it strangled him."

This was written in 1799, while Vidler was yet Trinitarian, and is among the boldest things of that intimidated time. And indeed, in that miserable period following Paine's "Age of Reason," when freethinkers were often imprisoned, and some Unitarians were swearing like St. Peter in denial of religious liberty, Vidler maintained that principle with fidelity; he exercised it steadfastly, progressing to larger views and bolder utterances to the day of his death.*

In March 1815 the committee requested Mr. Vidler to publish "a volume of his present lectures, comprising his three lectures on the existence of the Devil"; but he did not live to fulfil their wishes. Possibly those lectures, could they be found, might be of high value, as they represent his maturer years.

He built up the chapel anew, both spiritually and materially. In 1807 a hundred subscribers came forward to repair the building. The minister was guaranteed £140, and seems to have been given

* In September 1808, the *Monthly Repository*, conducted by Aspland and Vidler, contained a remarkably liberal reference to Thomas Paine: "The death of Mrs. Paine has given occasion for much abuse of her husband. This was needless, ungenerous and we believe in a great measure unjustifiable."

the collections. There was a "Unitarian Fund" (1806) for assisting weak chapels, of which Mr. Vidler was a trustee, and which gathered at Parliament Court Chapel an annual assembly to listen to a sermon and make offerings; this being followed by a dinner and toasts. On Sunday afternoons the congregation held conferences, the minister, by request, suggesting the subjects. There was an annual dinner for such members of the male sex as chose to attend, eminent guests being invited. A Sunday school was tried for a time, but was never very successful. They had a library in the chapel; they were growing in culture; all was flourishing; when the minister died, and darkness closed around them. But even amid that darkness arose their star, to lead them for a generation with ever-increasing light.

II

On November 24, 1816, the congregation at Parliament Court resolved: "That this congregation, entertaining a high sense of the character and talents of the Rev. W. J. Fox, and conceiving him to be eminently qualified to succeed our late revered minister, the Rev. W. Vidler, and to promote the great cause of truth and righteousness in this chapel, respectfully invite him to accept the pastorship of this congregation." On December 16, Mr. Fox accepted, adding: "May the Author of all good enable me so to discharge the duties as to serve the cause of genuine Christianity."

The biography of Mr. Fox is in the most competent hands, those of his daughter, Mrs. Bridell Fox; and this consoles me for the impossibility of here giving more than a sketch, vastly disproportionate to his services to us and to the world. He was born on a farm near Wrentham, Suffolk,

March 1, 1786. His father, Paul Fox, moved to Norwich when his son was three years old, and there the child had four years in a school connected with St. George's Independent Chapel. At Norwich his father was a weaver, and at twelve his son worked at the loom; hence his signature in the Anti-Corn Law League, "The Norwich Weaver Boy." Our first minister was the son of a mechanic; our second was a stonemason; and our third was a weaver: they all acquired classical education, but always loved the tradition of the Carpenter's Son. Paul Fox was a Radical politically, but rigidly religious. In 1834 his eminent son, in an article denouncing the hissing of an atheist, Julian Hibbert, in court, and refusal of his testimony, said in kindly appeal to atheists:

"I myself remember passing through similar sensations in my boyhood, being driven to churches and chapels innumerable, sometimes thrice in the day, to hear dull and measured routine services, and still duller sermons wherein dogmas were made to supply the place of logic, till the very name of religion became loathsome to me as something invariably connected with privation and suffering, and Christianity became synonymous with jesuitry and bigotry. Hatred of the tyranny practised in his name made me blind to the beautiful spirit of Christ, blind to the fact that he was a beneficent *radical* reformer of the numerous evils to which the human mind is subjected."

A friend of mine remembers his saying here: "I was brought up on the sour milk of Calvinism, and sorely it disagreed with me." How much does liberalism owe John Calvin! He burnt one heretic, but has made millions. Calvin gave us our Winchester, our Vidler, our Fox. But "the sour milk of Calvinism," in Fox's case, was not mother's milk. There being no children's books in the house, few books save the Bible, his mother got access to some library, and used to sit beside her son at the loom reading novels to him. So his imagination was cultivated. He became messenger in a bank at thirteen, which brought him money enough to buy books. He had a fondness for mathematics, and went through a thorough course.

Calvinism does not lose its grip on youth because of its repulsiveness; it held young Fox with its glittering eye, offered him the only door to a career, and one helpful to mankind. So in September 1806 he entered the Protestant Dissenting College at Homerton to study for the ministry under the eminent Dr. Pye Smith. The following is his original statement of belief on which he was admitted at Homerton:

"The Christian religion is a display of the perfections of God as they are exemplified in his conduct towards the human race. It teaches us that so depraved are we

by nature, and so vicious by habit, that it was impossible for God to offer pardon to such guilty creatures, unless reparation was made to his offended justice. Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, who dwelt in his bosom from all eternity, has in human flesh suffered the punishment due to our iniquities, and God has promised that whosoever believeth in him shall in nowise perish, but have everlasting life. Yet such is the infatuation which sin and Satan have produced in the human heart, that all would neglect this great salvation did not the Holy Spirit incline the heart of some to receive it, while the rest are left to experience the dreadful consequences of their obstinacy.

"Impressed with a deep sense of that Almighty Goodness which has snatched me as a brand from the burning, and animated me with an ardent desire to be an instrument in the hands of God of awakening some to the knowledge of their state, and the necessity of a crucified Saviour, it is my earnest wish to engage in the work of the ministry; relying not on my own strength, but on the grace of God, for support through the difficulties of that awfully responsible station, and fully resolved to devote, throughout the remainder of my existence, the talents with which I am entrusted to the glory of God, and the best interests of my fellow-creatures."

So low on the ladder, yet with such upward look, did William Johnson Fox set his feet, in his twentieth year! He was very shy; when preaching his first sermon to aged spinsters of a neighbouring almshouse he could hardly get out any words. To

the end of his life he was excessively nervous just before any public utterance. He left college early in 1810, with highest testimonials, and settled with the Independent Chapel at Fareham.

No sooner had he left college than he was beset by doubts. Probably he had, like most divinity students, indulged in heretical speculations without taking them very seriously, and believed them securely buried under graduation and ordination. But it will be seen by the following letter that Mr. Fox had hardly begun preaching before he found his doubts embarrassing. The letter, for which I am indebted to a grandson of the engraver of Mr. Fox's portrait, to whom it was written, is addressed: "Mr. Blood, engraver, Plaistow, Essex," and dated "Fareham, March 12, 1810":

"My dear Friend,—Your kind letter deserved acknowledgment, but my time is limited and my spirits rather low, and so you must not expect much of me. The truth is, I am so completely occupied with professional lectures, and when I have a few unemployed moments so completely absorbed in speculations which seem to have no end, as they leave me rather distracted than decided, that I scarcely know how to sit down to letter-writing, even to those who deserve and who possess no common share of my thoughts. Your little history I read with interest—the dear panting boy with his vermilion cheeks, and indeed the whole of the group, appeared in lively colours to my mind's eye as I read your letter. On

another subject to which you feelingly refer, you never need fear lest the ear of friendship should be tired. The memory of your and Hannah's father must be ever dear to me. There is something in the solemn calmness of feeling which such recollections produce which is grateful to the mind, and highly favourable to the purest dispositions of the heart. You will always, I trust, be sufficiently under the influence of religious truth to prevent degenerating into a pining melancholy. I wish almost every day to see your cottage. I cannot yet quite sacrifice the hope that in after-life, though I have not 'a goodly heritage,' the 'lines may fall in pleasant places,' rendered delightful by the friends of my heart. My future lot becomes every day more doubtful. I am hastening towards a time when I can no longer be handed along by circumstances, but must by one decision fix the complexion of my future life. My young friends say, Throw off the trammels of Orthodoxy, dissolve an unpromising connection *now*. My old friends will think me worse than mad to give up Fareham. My own plan at present is this—to fulfil my twelve months' engagement, to advance my sentiments boldly—explicitly—firmly, and at the end of the time to remain with them, should they wish it—only, on certain conditions, such as throwing open the doors of church fellowship to heretics, etc. If they submit to this, I cannot expect to find a more desirable situation. If they will not, I shall leave them with more credit than now, immediately after coming amongst them. We have many heretics here (Universalists, etc.), who vie with the others in zealous attachment to myself. This gives me fine opportunity for uniting and forming them. But alas! the heretics

understand one's discourse, and use their powers; while the orthodox are such fools that one may preach all the heresies in Christendom without their knowing it, unless they are told so. Should Bishop Bogue or any one else tell them so, then down go my castles in the air. During my next absence from them, in the course of which I must see Norwich, I shall make up my mind definitely. But really at present I am very unsettled. The universal attention with which I am treated, and consequent prospect of usefulness, attach me to the place more than any other consideration.

With Mary I have done but little.* I have not begun systematically on account of the very long interruption which must soon take place. I taught her the other day the difference between *seeing*, *dreaming*, and *thinking*, which she understood with great facility. By thinking, however, at present, she means no more than contemplating the image in the mind of an absent object—recollection, in strict language. I believe these are the first words she has been made to understand, except merely the names of objects. What a fine opportunity would this be for an observer, who had not five sermons a week to preach, to increase our knowledge of the operations of that curious machine the human mind. I have been for a few days in the Isle of Wight. Mythology has fixed the residence of the blessed in 'the Happy Isles,' and I could almost wish the fable realised, and this the spot. The rude hand of Winter had soiled its gentle beauties, but still ''twas lovely in my eyes.' The Society are almost worthy of the place. I was

* Mary Franklin was a deaf and dumb girl whom Mr. Fox taught while at Fareham.

received with the accustomed kindness. O, how it glads my heart, amid the ignorant and servile crowd with which one is compelled to associate, to meet with a few 'men of soul,' the ardent friends of Truth and Liberty. With two such, and with a lady of enlightened mind and playful fancy, I spent a most delicious evening in the Island. "In such society as this my weary soul would rest." Why have we not the common privileges Nature gives, and which her simplest children enjoy—that of living where and how we will, and moving as we please our habitations? Then might we collect our friends and form our horde, and choose our dwelling-place in such a paradise. Angels, charmed as of old with patriarchal simplicity, would condescend to visit——

They compel me to leave off for dinner. After dinner one is never inclined to reverie, so that you may expect a very sober conclusion. You can't think how heartily I loathe the spiritual conversation, as they call it, of the good folks. A nauseous chit-chat, half scandal, and half pure nonsense, is its common composition. Good Lord deliver us speedily from it! This afternoon I expect a little relief. I am going to tea with our clerk—a currier —who reads and thinks pretty much. We shall have a pic-nic of Colonel Wardle, Ben Flower, Robinson, Independence, Liberty, &c. &c. O my dear friend, do pity me—in truth I need it.

"I sympathise with you as to Halifax—painful intelligence is, I fear, what must be expected. Angels support their sister spirit! Just before I set off for Homerton I received a request to preach at Salter's Hall, and since I have been here they have written to engage me for the 18th and 25th. On the latter day I take their morning

service, and about that time you may expect me at Plaistow. Farewell, affectionate remembrance to T. and the dear boy.

"Success to your etching. Again, my dear friend, farewell. "W. T. Fox."

At the close of 1810, his twenty-fourth year, his mental struggles became painful; not one point only, but the whole confession by which he had entered college and obtained a congregation, began to float. Amid these doubts he was borne as by a torrent, his heart still moored to the old associations.

"I had at times, actually, fearfully, and vividly the prospect of being damned for not believing what I could not believe. . . . . It was amid deprecations and agitations that I pursued my inquiries. I had no sympathisers, no confidant; external expressions of what was going on did but occasion coldness, suspicion, alienation; my path was through dark valleys, shaken by an earthquake. It seemed as if there were a spell on me, and I must go on, feeling that I was going wrong, toiling to arrive at the abandonment of Heaven, and diligently working out my own damnation. The investigation became more and more fascinating. . . . . I used to take books on the Unitarian controversy to bed with me, and read them for hours with the candle on my pillow. . . . . In the first stage of my departure from Trinitarianism, when I was endeavouring to form a congregation at Fareham on a comprehensive principle, with Virtue and not Faith for the bond of union, as Robert Robinson says, I thought in my simplicity that some of those people whom I knew

to have gone about as far as I had then gone, long before I went so far myself, would have stood by me. The simple soul that I was! It was the thing in the world to which they were most decidedly averse."

The dogmas of Trinity and original sin were given up in 1810; pre-existence of Christ and Atonement were abandoned a year later; and the eternity of hell yielded in 1812. The free-born liberal might expect that this monstrous absurdity of hell would be the first abandoned; but it must be remembered that it was by that chronic panic about damnation that the whole system of absurdities was built up. No orthodox dogma would ever have been tolerated, had not reason been terrorised. Hell was largely the *raison d'être* of the priesthood; so by evolutionary law its terror was most deeply imbred. It is this that makes the spiritual progress of so many minds a series of convulsions instead of an easy and happy growth and expansion under the light of their time. When young Fox had prevailed against that phantasm, the inner storm was over; the peaceful azure spread above.

A minority of the church at Fareham followed him, and a separate society was formed, but I suppose could not support him. In 1812 the Southern Unitarian Association met at Portsmouth, and there Mr. Fox made his first speech in any

assembly of that denomination. Soon afterwards he settled with the Presbyterian (really Unitarian) Church at Chichester, where he passed five peaceful years.

There is one sentence in Mr. Fox's notes of experience which now has pregnant significance. He says that when his orthodoxy was leaving him, at Fareham, his first aim was to "form a congregation on a comprehensive principle, with Virtue and not Faith for the bond of union." The Ethical Culture leaders may thus learn that their movement was anticipated by the first minister of South Place fourscore years ago. On that principle this his chapel was founded, by it grew, and to it has remained faithful, despite one or two efforts after Mr. Fox's time to substitute some doctrinal bond.

Beside old Chichester Cathedral Mr. Fox found a congenial circle, and leisure for reading. He there met the lady he afterwards married. A brief diary of this twenty-sixth year shows literary along with critical religious studies. But it now appears strange that so free a spirit should have been so long confined in the scriptural prison. Thus, he comes upon a sentence of Justin Martyr, that the heavenly annunciation at Christ's baptism was, "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee," which, he sees, implies that "Jesus was divinely begotten when he

was consecrated to his high office." But there is no intimation that this turns the miraculous conception into a myth. He, and some other young scholars, by help of Griesbach, enlarged and decorated their biblical prison with new readings and translations, but they never thought of leaving it. Mr. Fox preached at various places, and lectured at Norwich. The letters to the lady referred to above have been printed, and are charming and sparkling as songs of the skylark in spring mornings.* But at the close of 1814 there are indications of inward discontent. He plainly needs a larger sphere of activity. The pretty but wayward lady at Chichester held his heart only for a time: his soul had found its true bride in the new faith that rescued him from the dungeon of Calvinism. His writings had already attracted much attention, notably his controversial letters to his old teacher at Homerton, Dr. Pye Smith. His eloquence was now widely reported. While orthodox, he had a remarkable power of pathetic expression, to which tears often responded. This continued, and with greater impressiveness, in his liberal appeals.

When Mr. Fox was settled in London, he was careful to guard against anything like ordination.

* Memoir of Mrs. Eliza Fox. Edited by Franklin Fox. 1869. She was born in 1793, and died April 21, 1869.

To an introduction by eminent ministers, which the Committee proposed,

"I can have," he wrote (14th Feb. 1817), "not the least objection, provided it be kept perfectly clear from anything which may look like *ordination*, to which ceremony under every form I have a strong dislike, from its tendency to transform a preaching brother into a priest, and to invest a minister with dignities and privileges to which, according to my notions, they have no Christian right.

"I do not know but that ordination may be so conducted as to be perfectly innocent and useful, but I am convinced that the practice has a tendency to abuse, which would never long remain dormant.

"There are certain evils felt now amongst the Independents, such as the exactions of a creed, the peculiar authority of ministers to invest with the ministerial office, erroneous notions of that office, &c., which spring immediately out of the ceremony, and will follow its adoption, in no long period, by any sect, however unexceptionable may be their first mode of adopting it. The best way, therefore, in my opinion, is to avoid it altogether."

This innovation gave the introduction of Mr. Fox (Wednesday, April 2, 1817) a real character. Robert Aspland delivered from the priesthood's favourite text (Matt. xviii. 15–20) a testimony against priesthood. Dr. Lindsay discoursed on the origin and constitution of Christian assemblies. Madge of Norwich, Gilchrist, and the patri-

archal Dr. Rees, welcomed the young minister with cordiality. Mr. Anderton, for the Committee, mentioned the steps taken to secure Mr. Fox; and a contemporary report says:

"Mr. Fox, in a short but animated address, signified his acceptance of the invitation, declining to make any confession of faith, except that he was a Christian and desired to be extensively useful as a Christian minister, which desire was the great motive to his removal from his late situation to so public and important a station in the metropolis. Unfettered and unlimited freedom he claimed for himself, and would cheerfully concede to all his brethren."

The chapel was crowded on this historical occasion, even at noon of a week-day. At four o'clock nearly one hundred gentlemen sat at the dinner at King's Arms, Poultry, with Fox at the head of the table. There was great enthusiasm, especially for the toast, "The cause of civil and religious liberty all over the world." That April 2 was so bright a day in the Society's calendar that it was thereafter chosen for the annual dinner.

Mr. Fox came at the right hour. The Unitarians were rather isolated, and he became a bond of union: they were scholastic, and he kindled a fire that warmed them all. Nevertheless, that great introductory day had sounded a note of discord in

Parliament Court, and I need hardly say it related to the source of harmony—the choir. Thirteen members protested against the musical attractions provided for the occasion, and the Committee (May 14) resolved:

"That the practice of introducing in the service of this chapel, solos, duets, and sacred pieces in which the congregation cannot unite, is quite incompatible with true devotion, and contrary to the general wishes of the congregation, and that the same be hereafter avoided. Resolved, that Mr. Smith be furnished with a copy of the foregoing resolution."

On June 5 the Committee, after ordering that the chapel should be lighted with gas, again touched the throne of Mr. Smith, the choir-master and organist:

"Resolved, that it is the opinion of this Committee that the practice of playing the organ immediately after the service is concluded is indecorous and improper."

In pursuance of this, minute directions were sent to the musical director, the concluding ones being: "Whenever 'Denmark' is played, the duet in that tune is to be omitted. You are not to play any voluntary on Sunday."* But the choir rebelled,

* I remember hearing the late Lord Houghton say that "Universalist" meetings were held in the home of his boyhood. The belief was that the Sacrifice of Christ's blood must be of unlimited effect. They were very Puritanical, and especially strict in Sabbatarianism.

and some of the progressives with them. The organist went on with voluntaries, and the anthems were sung; and when the Committee chose another organist, Mr. Smith refused to give up the key. This gentleman, a son-in-law of Mr. Fox's predecessor, Mr. Vidler, and a valuable member, claimed that the organ had been bought by Mr. Vidler, and he had a new lock put on it bearing his own name. That may now seem only amusing, but it was a tremendous thing for Parliament Court, and during that struggle the chapel was actually without any organ music for fifteen months. Then there was an arbitration, and Mr. Smith had to surrender.

But so far as I can make out, this rebellious Mr. Smith was a pioneer of the artistic music for which our Society afterwards became famous; and those who opposed him and his progressive minority, were survivals from the Puritan *régime*. For the chapel had still a technical connection with the Baptist Church, which it had been the means of splitting. It was legally registered as an Unitarian chapel, July 15, 1817, but not until June 13, 1819, more than two years after Mr. Fox had become the recognised leader of Unitarianism in London, did this Society formally unite itself with the Unitarian Association. Mr. Vidler's liberality did not extend in the direction of art; or so I judge from the fact

that while he was eking his little income by book-selling, he left his partner, Mr. Scarlett, because he published "The British Theatre."

I have dwelt on these details because they remind us of the narrow ethical conditions with which Mr. Fox had to deal. With his fine taste for music and the drama, his love of the various world, he had before him a large task of ethical culture. Although his services in liberating multitudes from orthodoxy were great, his larger service, in the earlier years, was the liberation of Unitarians from moral superstitions.

He had a grand congregation. His salary, which was £200 in the first year, became £300 in the second. The Unitarian Assemblies were usually held in his chapel, and he was universally admired. In the very first weeks of his ministry, the Unitarians saw this young man making an impression on the outside world unknown in their history. He was an enthusiast for the new Lancastrian system of education, by which the more advanced pupils taught the younger; and at the May festival of that association in the City Road School, attended by a thousand boys, Mr. Fox made such an eloquent speech that the Lord Mayor, Lord and Lady Darnley, and especially the Duke of Sussex, got him at their dinner, began to pet him, and he

seemed in fair way to be lionised by the aristocracy. In such extension of his influence Fox recognised his opportunity. He opened Parliament Court for evening lectures, which dealt with great public and social problems, Church and State, War, Philanthropy, Population, Human Perfectibility. These were heard by many leaders of public opinion. He was the great human revivalist. The failure of the French Revolution had brought under eclipse the high visions that had risen with it: the Radicals mourned their lost leaders, like Coleridge and Wordsworth, and faith in man was going down. Fox was the first to revive those visions, and raise again the song of the morning stars. And by bringing his Society into relation with the general cause of humanity, interesting them in public questions outside of Unitarian controversy, he gently drew them away from their lingering Puritanism, and placed their original textual dissent on the broad basis of human rights and welfare.

He was entirely fearless. In the midst of his popularity he had the courage to bring a sort of judgment-day among Unitarians. In 1819 Richard Carlile was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and £1500 fine, for publishing Paine's "Age of Reason." Mr. Fox says the first prose-

cution was conducted by a Unitarian.* There was loud applause in the court-room on the verdict of guilty.

On the Sunday preceding the trial, Mr. Fox boldly arraigned the whole principle of such prosecutions; and on October 24, 1819, after the verdict, but before the sentence, he gave a discourse which shines as the one religious candle in that dark time. And we can estimate the pious brutality of that time by the fact that a worthy citizen, his wife, and his sister, were all sent to languish in prison, and all their means confiscated, for no offence whatever except publishing that really religious book, "The Age of Reason." Mr. Fox was then a firm believer in Christianity and in the Bible, but his plea was the bravest word spoken in the pulpit during that shameful time. There was no mean or evasive word in it, no fling at Carlile or at Paine, the honesty of whose attack on Christianity he respects. He shows that in the equal rights to free speech,

* In 1817 Carlile was arrested on complaint of George Prichard, of Essex Street, and Thomas Fair. Sir Samuel Shepherd was Attorney-General. Carlile was imprisoned from August 14 to December. This was for publication of Elihu Palmer's "Light of Nature." In December 1818 he published Paine's "Age of Reason." He was prosecuted at the instance of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. On his trial he insisted on his right to read in defence the entire "Age of Reason," and Paine's other heretical writings, which thus went forth in the reports.

not only of Deists, but of Atheists, all religious freedom is involved. "There is no medium in principle between the liberty of all and the tyranny of a particular sect. Christians, you kindle a flame in which yourselves may perish."

I resist the temptation to quote from this admirable discourse, for its principles are now established; but seventy-five years ago they made London shudder. On the day following, the congregation met, and unanimously resolved:

"That this congregation do hereby express to the Rev. W. J. Fox the high degree of satisfaction with which they heard the manly, energetic, and argumentative discourse delivered by him last evening on the duties of Christians towards Deists, and earnestly request him to publish the same."

There were sharp replies from the narrow wing of Unitarianism when the sermon was published, but its best men rallied to the standard.

On August 19, 1821, he preached a discourse, now of historical interest, on the mournful death of Queen Caroline. It was a powerful and pathetic arraignment of those who embittered the life of the unhappy Queen. Fox now became a London institution. He was the darling of the "Non-Con Club" (Nonconformist), was made a Trustee of Dr. Williams's Library and Charities, and became a

favourite orator on public occasions. On April 20, 1820, he was married to Miss Eliza Florance, of Chichester. He was just then urging a Dissenters' Marriage Bill on Parliament, the need of which had a notable illustration in the fact that the minister of this Society had to be married in a church—St. George's-in-the-East.

To his ministerial and controversial labours Mr. Fox added literary work for the *Retrospective Review*. Among other things, he wrote a paper on Witchcraft, a valuable contribution to Demonology—really a sort of book, being more than sixty pages. But the strain of so much work was too great; his health broke down, and for a time his life was in danger. This was in February 1822; not until March 17, 1823, did he resume his pulpit. On this occasion he delivered a touching discourse, which was privately circulated.

On May 22, 1823, he laid the first stone of this chapel, with an address from which I quote:

"Hearers of Winchester, who yet survive, and in whose hearts and eyes the animation of youth rekindles when you remember how that apostle of benevolence came, proclaiming 'God is Love,' and tracing that principle with glowing eloquence to its glorious results: Hearers of Vidler, to whom his clear and nervous reasoning first demonstrated the kindred truth that God

is one, and who will long mournfully cherish the remembrance of his vigorous mind: you have seen, in the indication which this event affords of the progress to maturity of the Society whose infancy they cherished, and in the evidence which every day affords of the wide diffusion of their principles and ours, a sight which would have gladdened them, and in the enjoyment of which we are entering into their labours.

"This day be their memory blessed! You are about to follow them. All of us must soon pass away, and other generations shall succeed us here; but may the same spirit blend together all the successive generations that shall raise on this spot the voice of prayer and supplication, animating them with the like ardour for truth and righteousness; uniting them in love and good works; surrounding them with a bright atmosphere of usefulness on earth; and preparing them, ultimately, to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father!"

On the first day of February 1824 this chapel* was opened with a discourse by Mr. Fox: "The Spirit of Christianity, the same as the Spirit of Unitarianism"; the text being Romans viii. 9; his subject in the evening being Paul's discourse at Athens. The devotional part was by Rev. Russell Scott of Portsmouth, one of his earliest friends. On the day following occurred the inevitable dinner at London Tavern (185 present), at which it was

* The freehold cost £600. The cost of building the chapel was £3546.

made known that every seat in South Place Chapel was engaged.

In addition to the words already quoted, Mr. Fox consecrated this chapel to a worship of virtue and freedom above any doctrines he then held, some of which he gradually abandoned. He summoned as witnesses those "who have raised the standard of religious freedom, and fought its battles, and suffered in its cause, and prompted its manly and generous assertions, not only for those who were like-minded with themselves, but on behalf of all"; and exclaimed: "Here be the tree planted that bears such fruit, and long may it flourish, for it is the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations!"

And so, my friends, was transplanted and here rooted the tree long fruitful, and to us venerable. The trust-deed (enrolled March 2, 1825) provided for the growth and expansion of the tree. It established this chapel "as a place for the public religious worship of One God, even the Father, and for instruction in the Christian religion as professed by the said Society, at such times, according to such forms, and under such regulations as are now adopted, or shall from time to time be adopted by the said Society."

This trust, made not only to the existing Society, but expressly to its "future members," subjects both

Yours very truly
Sarah T. Bolton

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worship of the Father and instruction in the Christian religion to those subsequent modifications which they underwent, in Mr. Fox's time, unchallenged. This of course is of no legal importance at the present time; but seventy years ago there was no such statute of limitations as that now protecting trusts, and the careful provision of our fathers for future changes of belief proves how deliberately, at a time when Deists were in prison and Unitarians in peril, they planted the taproot of their tree in liberty.

All of this is the more remarkable and the more notable because at that time, and for some years later, Mr. Fox himself had not questioned the authority of the Bible. That he was still regarded as a firm believer, even by his most intimate friends, appears by a letter to him written by Sarah Flower, known to the world as Sarah Flower Adams, author of "Vivia Perpetua," and the hymn "Nearer, my God, to Thee." This letter (for which I am indebted to Mr. Fox's daughter, Mrs. E. Bridell Fox) was written from Harlow, November 23, 1827, when Sarah Flower was twenty-two years of age.

"You did not ask me to write, and perhaps will be little thankful for what you are like to receive, a regular confession of faith, or rather the want of it, from one whom you little suspect guilty of the heinous sin of unbelief. It reads like half jest: never was I more

serious. My mind has been wandering a long time, and now it seems to have lost sight of that only invulnerable hold against the assaults of this warring world, a firm belief in the genuineness of the Scriptures.

"No, not the only one. I do believe in the existence of an All-wise and Omnipotent Being—and that, involving as it does the conviction that everything is working together for good, brings with it comfort I would not resign for worlds. Still, I would fain go to my Bible as I used to—but I cannot. The cloud has come over me gradually, and I did not discover the darkness in which my soul was shrouded until, in seeking to give light to others, my own gloomy state became too settled to admit of doubt. It was in answering Robert Browning that my mind refused to bring forward argument, turned recreant, and sided with the enemy. And when I went to Norwich [musical festival], oh, how much I lost! In all the choruses of praise to the Almighty my heart joined, and seemed to lift itself above the world to celebrate the praises of him to whom I owed the bliss of those feelings; but the rest of the 'Messiah' dwindled to a mere musical enjoyment; and the consciousness of what it might once have been to me brought the bitterest sensations of sadness, almost remorse.

"And now, as I sit and look up to the room in which I first had existence, and think of the mother who gave it, and watch the window of the chamber in which she yielded hers, in death as in life a fervent Christian, that thought links itself with another—how much rather would she I had never been, than to be what I now am.

"I have a firm belief in a resurrection—at least I think I have—but my mind is in a sad state; and before that

goes, I must endeavour to build up my decaying faith. How is it to be done? I want to read a good ecclesiastical history. I dare not apply to papa. I dare not let him have a glimpse at the infatuation that possesses me. Had he been less rigid in his ideas of all kinds of unbelief, it would have been better for me. But I have had no one either to remove or confirm my doubts, and Heaven alone knows what uneasiness they have given me. I would give worlds to be a sincere believer; to go to my Bible as to a friend in the hour of trouble, feeling that whatever might befall, *that* would never desert me, and defying the world to rob me of its consolations.

"My life has been like a set of gems on a string of gold—a succession of bright and beautiful things without a dark thread to dim their lustre. But it will not be always thus. It is not thus now, and some resources I must have against the evil time which is beginning to set in. The very study will be a delight, even if it has not the desired result. The consciousness that I have not examined as far as in me lies, weighs heavily upon me, and to you I now look to direct my inquiries. 'Tis a bold step, and I wonder how I could bring myself to it. I have often longed to speak to you, but *that* I could not do. And now, it seems as if I could not bear to speak to any one, but I want quietly to read in my own room. What? Why any books that you would deem suitable.

"I shall soon be at home [in London], and if you will lend them, and let me read them, my mind will, at all events, be relieved from whatever portion of guilt may mingle in its present uneasiness.

"I hope this will not worry you. I would not be one to add to the annoyances that visit you; but that you

have a sincere regard for me, I now believe; and how it is returned let this confidence which you possess, unshared by any one beside, bear testimony.

"I long to come home. Harlow is not what it once was, and it has added to the feeling of loneliness which has been coming on. Though I may often be mirthful, I am not always happy. But I am in a sad mood this morning, and to-morrow may be brighter in the heavens and in the heart. So I will not write any more than one thing, and that you know already—that I am yours affectionately, SALLY.

"Burn, and forget—not me and those books—but the letter and low spirits."

Out of such pangs was born the hymn "Nearer, my God, to Thee," sung here for nearly a generation before caught up by the outside world; the hymn which Christians throughout the world are singing in different tunes, unconscious as yet that it is really a hymn of their pilgrimage from the old faith to the new.* The first draft of it, a beautiful autograph,

* The history and adventures of this hymn would make an interesting monograph. Many curious incidents are connected with it in America, of which I will mention two. In the year of the Centenary of American Independence (1876) I was in America, and occasionally visited evangelical gatherings, observing that their chief inspiration was from this hymn. About that time—perhaps in 1875—there was a great meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in Washington City, from which the Unitarian minister, Dr. Shippen, was pointedly excluded. At its prayer-meeting, which I attended, there was no fervour at all, until a blind preacher, Rev. Thane Miller, arose, and asked all to join in singing "Nearer, my God, to Thee"—a hymn written by a much

Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee!
Yes tho' it be a cross
That raiseth me!
Still all my song would be
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee!

Response. Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee!

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Tho like the wanderer
The sun gone down
Darkness be over me
My restia } pillow } stone
Yet in my } night } dreams I'd be
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee

Response. Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee

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There let the way appear
Steps unto heaven -
All that thou sendst to me
In mercy given,
Angels, to bechon me
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee

Response. Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee!

Then with my waking thoughts
Bright with my [illegible] praise!
Out of those stony griefs
'Bethel I'll raise
So by my woes to be
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee'

Response - Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee!

Or if on joyful wings
Cleaving the sky
Sun moon & stars forgot
Upward I fly
Still all my song should be
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee

Response - Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee

November. 1840.

was exhibited by Mr. Fox's daughter at a recent soirée at South Place. It is written for choral responses, Mr. Fox and Eliza Flower having adopted a plan, once suggested by Mrs. Barbauld, of a choral antiphone between the choir and the congregation. Now, the heart of the world is responding!

Were inner history traceable, there might be found in Sarah Flower's touching letter to Mr. Fox, a tributary to the spiritual life and history of our Society. The letter was in advance of his opinions at that date, and what influence may it have had in enlarging those opinions? I have told you of Elhanan Winchester, founder of this Society; how his hard Calvinism yielded under the touch of a New England maiden, whose name he never knew—one sunbeam from her larger faith—and it may be that

more unorthodox person than Dr. Shippen. That excited deep emotion. Mr. J. Ward Diehl, of Watsontown, Pennsylvania, tells in the New York *Truth-seeker* (August 19, 1893) the following incident of travel on a coach, with eight women and two men: "One woman began a conversation by stating that the little eight-year-old daughter of the Evangelical minister of the town we had just left was to be buried that day. . . . . 'Last night,' began the woman, 'there was not a soul in that minister's parlour, which adjoined the room containing the corpse, and all at once the organ in the parlour began to play, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." This was the favourite piece of the dead child.'" This story, Mr. Diehl adds, was accepted by all on the coach except himself, and that he was looked on as a "monster" because of his evident incredulity.

the last remnant of Calvinism that clung to this Society, biblical authority, yielded under the English maiden's heartbroken confession. Well named was Sarah Flower. Sweetest flowers have bitter buds. That budding doubt of hers blossomed under her minister's culture to beauty and fragrance, and by the fruit that followed many sad hearts like hers were nourished into strength and joy.

III

In the "Encyclopædia Britannica" there is an article on Unitarianism in which this chapel is not mentioned, nor Mr. Fox; yet it was in this chapel that the British and Foreign Unitarian Association was founded, and Mr. Fox was its first Foreign Secretary. The Unitarians, whose earliest congregation was organised (1774) in Essex Street, London, by Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, had afterwards several small associations, the most important being the Unitarian Fund for helping weak societies. When Mr. Fox became minister of this Society it established an Auxiliary Fund, June 29, 1817; and between that date and 1830 this Society assisted about fifty others, £600 being given in this way. This was in addition to raising £400 per annum for the minister, and building this chapel, at a cost of £4146 (to which the Unitarian Association contributed £200).

It was on Wednesday, May 25, 1825, that the Unitarians, gathered from their various Associations,

discussed in this chapel, where they usually met (it being the largest) the project submitted by Mr. Fox for union "on a more comprehensive basis." It was agreed to, not without some misgivings, and on the following day, at London Tavern, was organised the British and Foreign Unitarian Association.

It is to be feared that Unitarians hardly appreciate the historical significance and honour of that title. Adoption of the word "Foreign," omission of the word "Christian," denoted a new departure in Unitarianism, due not to English but to Indian influences. It was preceded by an interesting history. While Mr. Fox and others were in their agonies of revolution against British idolatry, a Hindu, a really great man, Rammohun Roy, was trying to deliver his countrymen from idolatry. Then he helped to liberate us in the West; and Rammohun Roy was, I believe, really the cause of the organisation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. Rammohun Roy's movement was of purely Indian origin. A scholar of ancient and high family, and sufficient means, he had good education, and had studied in various oriental regions. He had mastered the Persian language and literature; learned Sanskrit, and translated select passages from the Vedas; he had lived among the Moslems and learned Arabic; having studied Oriental religions, he became a pure

theist. For this he suffered persecution, and left Calcutta for Benares. In 1803 he began to teach his new views, and established the society which developed into the Brahmo-Somaj. In 1811 he started the agitation against widow-burning, which mainly by his efforts was abolished eighteen years later. He had studied Hebrew and Greek in order to read the Bible intelligently, and in 1820 published his "Precepts of Jesus." In that year, when he was instructing his Brahmos in Calcutta, a Baptist missionary, who was teaching him Greek—Mr. Adam—tried to convert him to Trinitarianism, but was himself converted to Unitarianism. Some of Rammohun Roy's adherents had started a society in Madras, and it was this Society which put itself in communication with our own. On September 30, 1820, the Parliament Court Society sent five guineas to the native Unitarians of Madras; and soon after South Place Chapel was opened it sent (September 12, 1824) twenty pounds to help to build the Anglo-Indian Unitarian Chapel in Calcutta, still, I believe, used by the Brahmo-Somaj. It was these facts, and the Hindu religious poetry translated by Rammohun Roy into English, which awakened Mr. Fox to a recognition of a unity larger than Unitarianism. He startled many prejudices, and had to conquer prejudices about "heathenism,"

before he could obtain an association large enough to include Rammohun Roy. The Hindu teacher really had a nobler religion than any western thinker; indeed, there were then in all the religious world few peers of Rammohun Roy. With him began the reaction of Oriental upon Western thought, which has since been so fruitful. Mr. Fox recognised his Hindu master in the distance, sat in spirit at his feet, and learned how to enlarge his conception of Christianity until it inevitably became to him a universal and human religion.

The Unitarians generally, though it may be feared some have rejected the best fruit of that "foreign" seed imported in 1825, rejoiced in its flower. And that flower expanded visibly in this chapel on May 25, 1831, when the sixth anniversary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association was here held. The Rajah Rammohun Roy himself, now called the "Apostle of the East," had been sent by the Emperor of Delhi as an ambassador to the British Government, and arrived (May 8) just in time to be here on that great occasion. It was a very memorable day in the history of Liberalism. The Rev. Hugh Hutton of Birmingham preached an animated sermon in the morning, on the text (Mark xii. 29–31): "Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord

our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this: Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." But in the evening came the great meeting. The chapel was thronged with eminent men and women. Among those present were the President of Harvard University, Dr. Kirkland, and deputatations from France and Transylvania. The Rev. Robert Aspland presided; Dr. Carpenter, Sir John Bowring, Dr. Kirkland, Dr. Rees, and others made speeches; and the Rajah spoke impressively. He spoke of the opposition he had met in India from Christians: "They always lay a stress on mystery and mystical points, which serve to delude their followers; and the consequence is that we meet with such opposition in India that our progress is very slight." All were charmed by the noble presence of the Hindu teacher. The great speech of the occasion was of course by Mr. Fox. His immediate plea was for the establishment of unsectarian Domestic Missions in England to improve "the temporal and spiritual condition" of the people, and "illustrate their religion by deeds of love and mercy"; a scheme much opposed pre-

viously, but recognised in the presence of a Hindu whose greatness seemed to show that foreign missionaries might well be recalled for home work. In the conclusion Mr. Fox greeted the visitors—Frenchmen, Transylvanians, and the Americans successively; then, turning to the Rajah, he said:

"And when our oriental friend shall return, if return he must (long be it delayed!), to his native regions, may he have to report that Europe is not only as supreme as he esteems it in sciences, arts, and arms, but is beginning to aspire to a supremacy in benevolence, which shall annihilate all other supremacies, and even in the end its own, by assimilating and exalting human feeling and human character in all the regions of the world. The Rajah remarked to me the other day, with somewhat of an indignant feeling, that he had been shown a painting of Jesus Christ, and that the painter was false, for he had given him the pale European countenance, not remembering that Jesus Christ was an oriental. The criticism was just. Those theologians have painted falsely, too, who have portrayed Christianity as a cold intellectual religion, and not given it that rich oriental colouring of fancy and of feeling with which the Scriptures glow, and by which they possess themselves, not only of the mind, but the heart and soul of man. Oh, thus may our religion appear, creating the whole human race anew in the image of their Creator!"

Thus Mr. Fox led the way not only towards humanising Unitarianism, by associating it with the

Hindu movement, but also by making it a philanthropy. This Society had long been liberal and active in charitable work. It annually gave from £50 to £60 to the poor. There had been founded by the Society in 1815 an "Infants' Friend Society," for the relief of "new-born infants and their mothers." This was reconstituted in 1830, and placed under the management of eighteen ladies of the congregation.

This philanthropy is the more interesting because it does not appear that at any time the chapel was frequented by the so-called working class, not even during the Reform Bill agitation, when Mr. Fox was their orator in open-air meetings, and while he was a leader in the Corn Law agitation. The chapel was mainly carried on by middle-class people, and for a long time a shilling entrance fee was paid by those who had not seats. Thomas Carlyle told me of his coming to hear Mr. Fox. His eloquence, said Carlyle, was like opening a window through London fog into the blue sky. "But," he added, "I went away feeling that Fox had been summoning those people to sit in judgment on matters of which they were no judges at all." I assured Carlyle that therein he was mistaken; Mr. Fox was teaching the teachers, men and women who, or many of them, were centres of influence in

their several spheres. And among those whose youth was largely influenced by Mr. Fox a considerable number, some of them still living, did, or are doing, noble service for every human cause—men like John Stuart Mill; Peter Alfred Taylor, the brave commoner; Mrs. Frank Malleson, who founded the Working-women's College; reformers like Slack, Saul, Whitehead, Macmorran, Holyoake, Ashurst, Dixon, Collet, Ryall, Braham, Johnson, Marsden, Raftery, Cunnington, Levey, Walters and Ragg; and families whose names rank high in the annals of this city—as the Waterlows, Hicksons, Lyons, Taylors, Courtaulds. I name some whom I have always associated with Mr. Fox's ministry. You will recall others. I have recently received a letter from an old officer of the Mint, Joseph Newton, who tells me that in the later years of Mr. Fox's life he once found him sitting in the transept of the Crystal Palace, and approached him, and told him that his whole life had been influenced by his discourses. The conversation was almost affectionate, the parting affecting. And how many venerable men are there who cherish memories like these? And not alone in this country. I remember well some dark days in my own ministry at Washington, when many friends were leaving me (1856) because I had arraigned the great national wrong—Slavery. I lost my pulpit, but among those

who stood by me were some who had learned the principles of liberty and justice within these walls. And when, later, at Cincinnati, I was losing friends for some discourses against supernaturalism, several of those who befriended me were men whose fetters had fallen under the voice of Mr. Fox. I have known in America others who were trained by Mr. Fox, and I never knew one who faltered in any cause involving human freedom or intellectual liberty.

On that great day when Rammohun Roy was welcomed by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in this chapel—I may almost call it the pentecostal day of Liberalism—a young lady entered with Mr. and Mrs. Fox, and sat in their pew near the pulpit. And here for the first time she heard her name pronounced in public. The British and Foreign Unitarian Association had offered three prizes for essays on the means of diffusing their faith among Jews, Moslems, and Catholics. It was now announced that all three prizes were awarded to Harriet Martineau. She was the young lady who sat beside Mrs. Fox, until that moment ignorant of her success. Harriet Martineau was then under thirty, and though she had written industriously, was little known to the world. But Mr. Fox had recognised her powers five years before, had brought her from Norwich, paid her for articles, introduced

her to the Mills and other literary people. She says that, next to the assistance of her brother James, that of Mr. Fox was "the occasion, and in great measure the cause, of the greatest intellectual progress I ever made before thirty."

From that day, when her name and success were announced to the Unitarians assembled in this place, Harriet Martineau's literary position was assured. This became the home of her soul. And when, on October 13, 1833, a memorial service was here held for the Rajah Rammohun Roy, who had suddenly died at Bristol, Harriet Martineau wrote a hymn for the occasion, which was sung at the close to music composed by Eliza Flower—the first original compositions ever sung here:

"No faithless tears, O God, we shed
For him who to Thine altars led;
A swallow from a distant clime,
Found rest beneath the cherubim.
In Thee he rests from toil and pain:
O, Father, hear our true Amen!

"No faithless tears! Led forth by Thee,
Meek pilgrim to the sepulchre,
For him Thy truth from day to day
Sprang up, and blossomed by the way.
Shalt Thou not claim Thine own again?
O, bend to hear our deep Amen!

"No faithless tears! Though many dream
To see His face by Ganges' stream;
Though thousands wait on many a shore,
The voice that shall be heard no more;
O, breathe Thy peace amid their pain,
And hear Thy children's loud Amen!"

Rammohun Roy desired to have written on his tomb the line of a Persian poet: "The true way of serving God is to do good to man." In his funeral discourse Mr. Fox asked all to adopt that as the rule of their own conduct. To it he dedicated himself; and from that time he more and more abandoned Christian legends, and steadily advanced towards the fervent and catholic Theism of which he became a foremost English apostle. The word "catholic" is especially descriptive of his religious sentiment in maturer life. The controversial tone of Mr. Fox, while emancipating himself and his Society from the Calvinistic dogmas and puritanical "survivals," made way for a poetic catholicity which regarded all the religions of the world as phases of a divine education of the race. He loved and often selected for the choir Pope's Universal Prayer:

"Father of all, in every age,
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord."

In 1829, when many Dissenters were petitioning Parliament against Catholic emancipation, Mr. Fox and his Society acquired honourable eminence by their exertions for that measure of justice to opponents. In the beginning of that year the Society passed a resolution :

"That the Committee be instructed to take such measures as may appear to them necessary towards obtaining a repeal of all penal statutes affecting religious opinions, and more especially those affecting our Roman Catholic brethren."

The same year witnessed Catholic emancipation, but left twelve Deists in prison. This persecution may have led Mr. Fox to examine more closely the religion of Deists. After the Catholic emancipation he became interested in the question of the civil disabilities of the Jews, and commenting on some utterances of the Bishop of Hereford on that subject (1834), he wrote : "If this be the figure under which Christianity is to continue to be exhibited by its recognised leaders, there needs no prophet to predict that, as the religion of the people of this country, it will not last two more generations." But at this time he felt an increasing repugnance to the Deity of the Old Testament.* He had probably been re-

* "I once sat down to make a list of all the very words of the Deity that I could find recorded in the Scriptures. It began

reading Thomas Paine when in an article on Cobbett (*Monthly Repository*, 1835, p. 486) he wrote:

"He has been very absurdly compared with Paine, whom he excelled as much in fertility of popular illustration as he fell short of him in the faculty of generalising, and in the condensed, yet imaginative expression of abstract principles. Paine's merits as a writer are scarcely yet appreciated; those of Cobbett render themselves felt instantly."

The name of Paine was especially odious to many Unitarians, accused of being in the "half-way house to Paine," and Mr Fox's remark is significant. But in that same year, 1835, he is found speaking tenderly of Roman Catholic superstition. The passage referred to is in a discourse on "The Moral Omnipresence of God," the manuscript of which was presented to me by a lady of this Society many years ago.* I give the extract, which illustrates not

grandly; 'God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light.' But it soon got entangled in such personal, local, jéjune, and questionable matters, that I gave up the attempt, stopped short in the list, and arrived at the conviction that there was more of the wisdom of God in the words of the man Christ Jesus than in all the recorded declarations of the Jewish Jehovah."—*From the Discourse on the 25th Anniversary*, 1842.

* After his fortieth year Mr. Fox never read sermons. His preparation was in shorthand notes, and he sometimes had books beside him from which to read extracts. The published discourses were written out from his shorthand notes by Eliza Flower; but that in my possession seems to be in his own hand-

only the catholicity referred to, but the style of preaching which, with the "lute-like voice" remembered by Holyoake and the eloquence described by Hazlitt, charmed his generally cultured audiences:

"It was only a few days ago that I was witness to the adoration of a mere bit of wood. It was at the feast of the raising of the Cross, which is celebrated at this season in Catholic countries. I saw this bit of wood, enshrined in gold, carried along by the priests in their flowing robes; and in the countenances of the kneeling multitude there was an expression of the most fervent devotion and gratitude, which was well worthy of remark; but not merely on account of the striking fact, that an implement, disgraceful as the gallows—indeed, far more so, for no free man was crucified, whatever his crime might be—should by a strong association with a striking instance of moral heroism, become an object of reverence. Far more than this: there was the germ of all that is lovely, good, and noble in feeling. The people felt that sympathy with suffering greatness which made the tears run down their cheeks; and then they sympathised with

writing, though smaller than usual, and of extreme nicety. The title is on a separate page, and beneath it is a verse which, in his collection, is added to L. E. L.'s hymn, "The Presence of Perpetual Change," etc.:

"In all changes brighter things
And better have their birth;
The presence of perpetual love
Is ever on the earth."

On the last page is copied Mrs. Adams' hymn, "O Love! thou makest all things even.'

the glorious triumph over the powers of evil. And what is this but the greatest and purest emotion—that which shall at some future time, in this life or the next, become the realisation of the moral omnipresence of God in all that fulness of glory which the lofty imagination ascribes to the Eternal Spirit? And we may trace the moral presence of God in fanaticism as well as in superstition. If we see a man with his whole attention fixed upon a single verse of the Scripture (one of those who, believing in plenary inspiration, think every sentence contains infinite truth)—fixed upon this from day to day, from hour to hour, concentrating all his powers and knowledge to its elucidation, compressing and squeezing out of it, as it were, every particle of truth it may contain, fixing his mind on it till every jot is rooted in his soul: though all this is the result of a grievous error, one tending to form creeds for the mind which more than all crush and oppress the soul: still, I pity the man who does not see in this intelligence, thus strongly called forth to activity, that which will outrun its text, break down its dungeon walls, and having disposed of its mistakes, will stand forth and proclaim to the nations, Behold your God!"

The Cross has given more than two hundred words of varied meanings to our language, but no interpretation more transcendant than that which Mr. Fox's quick sympathies derived from the devout tears of kneeling Catholics, who would have regarded him as an agent of Antichrist.

The phrase, "outrun his text," probably had a special meaning for Mr. Fox's audience. He had

recently been "outrunning his texts." Perhaps it was under an influence left by Rammohun Roy that Mr. Fox recognised some sectarian narrowness in raising the Scripture of one religion authentically above those of all others. He kept a book in which were copied passages suitable for his lectionary, mainly from classical authors, but including a few oriental extracts translated by Rammohun Roy. The discourse from which I have just read is the earliest I have found without any Scripture text. I also remark in this discourse a consideration even for atheists. Having opened with a theistic argument, he adds:

"Those who aspire after truth must be careful not to impose on themselves by words, and the theist must be equally careful with the atheist, and in his horror of atheism should remember that belief is as solemn a thing as unbelief. On a subject so vast, that we feel as if the powers of our mind would sink under it, the wisest sayings are but children's bubbles; and in dealing with the Infinite we should keep in mind that we are but the creatures of yesterday; and that it therefore becomes us to show humility and diffidence with regard to belief in as well as disbelief of an Almighty Ruler of the Universe."

That is the highest watermark ever reached by any Liberalism claiming the Christian name. And it is the more worthy of homage because Mr. Fox

never had a doubt of the existence of a Deity in his life.*

It was a harder matter to be magnanimous to the English Church. The atheists had hardly yet shown their head, the deists were in prison, the Catholics and Jews were under popular odium; but the English Church was powerful, arrogant, and oppressive. And yet the great-hearted and clear-headed Mr. Fox was equal to this also.

In lately advocating reform of the Church instead of disestablishment, I was not aware that Mr. Fox had to a considerable extent been before me by sixty years. At the close of 1833, reviewing in his *Monthly Repository* a pamphlet advocating indiscriminate disestablishment and disendowment, he

* In the London *Times*, November 29, 1833, a paragraph appeared, headed "Hissing an Atheist." Mr. Julian Hibbert, called as a witness before Alderman Browne, stated, when the Bible was presented, that he was an atheist. He was insulted by the attorney, Charles Phillips, and hissed by the people present, the jury joining, and Alderman Browne expressed satisfaction in this display of religious sentiment. On this, Mr. Fox wrote (*Monthly Repository*, January 1834) an admirable rebuke of the alderman and the attorney. "A man," he said, "professing to be an atheist may nevertheless be a moral man, as far as regards his social duties; and if he be a punctilious man in regard to truth—which declaring his belief in opposition to public obloquy is mostly a proof of—it is utterly absurd and mischievous to incapacitate him from giving his evidence in a court of law."

described such a scheme as "penny-wise and pound-foolish," adding:

"What is called Church property is in fact a public trust of property, assigned in perpetuity for a particular purpose, the spiritual and moral culture of the people.

"The community would be little benefited by its being seized and thrown into that great quagmire, the National Debt. Still less is there occasion to make a present of the tithes to the landlords. The best thing would be for the property to remain intact; commuting the tithes for land, or land's worth in money; and for the nation to reap the benefit of its original appropriation, that appropriation being interpreted in accordance with the knowledge which mankind have gained since the endowments were founded. The donors thought that the essence of moral and spiritual culture was in the rites and ordinances of the Romish Church. It was long ago discovered that they were mistaken; and that the funds which they left were properly applied to the purer and ampler instruction of the Episcopal Church. Very well; the people are ripe for and need a more pure and ample instruction still. The Church of England is in the same predicament now as the Church of Rome was three centuries ago. Then, the old mass and the mysteries would not do any longer. They were found insufficient. And the services and sermons of the clergy are found insufficient now, and they will not do any longer. We want something more and better for the money; and the nation has a right to the most and the best which that money will procure. Not only religion of so comprehensive a form that few will dissent from it, or so varied

that almost all might join in that which they preferred; but education also—a thorough education for the entire population, the apparatus of scientific experiments, lectures on all topics which can be illustrated by lecturing, institutes and libraries; in short, the complete mental culture of the people might be provided for out of what is called Church property, and would be the enlightened direction of that property towards the end which the founders contemplated in their blind and superstitious way. This would surely be much better than breaking up the Establishment, and allowing all the world to scramble for the spoils. Instead of putting up the cathedrals and churches to public auction, as our author proposes, we would keep them in good repair, let all denominations share with the Episcopal in the use of them on Sunday, under such regulations as time and locality [I would add competency and culture] require; and in them, and in the chapels which would thus be vacated, there would be noble accommodation through the week for the lecturer, the schoolmaster, artistical exhibitions, and social meetings."

These principles were perfectly consistent with the persistent protest made by Mr. Fox against the practical union of Church and State then existing.*

* In 1837 Mr. Fox's discourse on this subject was published and sold in aid of Mr. Burden and the Braintree parishioners for losses consequent on refusal to pay Church rates. Thirty years later, a discourse of mine was inspired by the imprisonment of James Grant, then of Kettleburgh, Suffolk, head of a family long connected with this chapel, for refusing to pay the Church rate. Our friend Mr. Grant was imprisoned in White Cross

In 1833 he gave six lectures "On Church Reform, considered as a national and not a sectarian object"; and on Sunday, March 9, 1834, the South Place Society adopted and signed a petition which was presented to Parliament by Joseph Hume. In this it is said:

"Your petitioners are earnestly desirous of such amendments in the existing laws as shall secure the public benefit of a correct registration of births, marriages, and deaths; allow the marriage contract to be entered into without submission to a prescribed religious ceremony; prohibit any restriction of the advantages and honours of the universities by the imposition of a theological test; and exonerate all classes from compulsory payments towards the support of a Church from which they dissent: but that your petitioners regard these and many other evils which might be enumerated, as merely emanations from one great practical grievance, namely, the alliance of a Church with the State, so that while one sect is established, all others are only tolerated, and their members are, by the very fact of this legal partiality, subjected to insult, injury, and degradation."

The petitioners further, in well-weighed words, "disclaim any hostility to the Episcopal Church in its spiritual capacity," desire from the funds "due

Street, March 1867, for six months, and soon after release was present in the House of Commons at the passing of the Church Rates Abolition Bill (1868). He was the last person who suffered for Church rates.

provision for their present recipients," and application of the residue to such national education as would fulfil the real intent of the endowments.

Parliament has responded to this South Place petition. Every particular grievance it pointed out has been removed. That those grievances were not, as our fathers believed, emanations from the alliance of Church and State, is proved by the fact that the alliance survives their removal. That evils still accompany that alliance is certain, but the experience of this Society may render us doubtful whether such remaining evils are necessary "emanations" of the alliance; and if in sixty years every oppression enumerated has been redressed, we may feel encouraged to hope that reforming earnestness equal to that of our predecessors may remove the obstructions that prevent the free and full entrance of the highest genius and learning of England into its Church, and the utilisation of that mighty engine for the culture and elevation of the whole nation.

Mr. Fox was an uncompromising Radical in opposing any particular wrong—like slavery, or the Corn Law; but when it came to constitutional changes he could never be harnessed by any party. He thought for himself. Thus he admired Roebuck, but would not follow him in his scheme for an elective House of Lords. With the same wisdom

that characterised his plan of Church Reform, he would reform the House of Lords by relieving it of legislative functions; he would allow it to return a measure to the House of Commons with objections; but if the Commons then passed it, the measure would become law.

I must, however, resist the temptation to follow Mr. Fox as a political orator—an orator under whose voice, as I heard Mr. Froude say, the masses bent as forests beneath the storm; whose eloquence however, was not stormy, not the mere militant blast that overthrows Jerichos, but rather the Orphic strain that builds the many-gated walls of civilisation. Nor can I now estimate the literary career of Mr. Fox. The man who helped Mill and Dr. Brabant to found the *Westminster Review*, and wrote its first article; who drew around him a fine literary circle—Hazlitt, Thomas Campbell, J. S. Mill, Douglas Jerrold, Leigh Hunt, Talfourd, Pemberton, Horne, John Forster, Crabbe Robinson, Browning, Macready, Helen Faucit, the Novellos, Hennells, Brabants, Brays, Adamses, Howitts, Cowden Clarkes, and many literary pilgrims from America and other foreign lands; who gave the first welcome to the Martineaus;* who first recognised the genius of

* The Rev. James Martineau, a fellow-citizen of Norwich, was in intimate relations with Mr. Fox, who, in the spring of 1831,

Tennyson, and over Robert Browning's youthful work cried *Eureka!* who was Macready's right-hand man in elevating the British stage—such a writer requires studies more extended than are possible here. The Memorial edition of his works is in twelve volumes, but twice as many would hardly contain his valuable writings. In the *Monthly Repository*—to which he contributed for many years, and edited from 1831 to 1836, writing many of the articles—you will find a better history than anywhere else of the progress of English thought and reform during the first twenty years of this chapel.

And in that progress this Society was ever in

visited him in Dublin, and preached before a newly formed Unitarian Association there. A pleasant incident of that visit was Mr. Fox's "dedication" of Dr. Martineau's eldest son, Russell, now the distinguished Hebraist of the British Museum. In October 1831 Dr. Martineau was invited to succeed the Rev. P. Taylor, deceased, whose assistant he had been in the Eustace Street Chapel, Dublin, but was unwilling to participate in the *Regium Donum*—about £16,000—distributed by the State to the Presbyterian Churches. Martineau's admirable letter of resignation (reluctantly accepted, November 13, 1831) was published by Mr. Fox in the *Monthly Repository* of the following month. In that month Martineau visited Fox at Dalston, and preached for him at South Place. He was urged by Fox to settle in London, with the Stamford Street Congregation (where an invitation was probable), and take charge of the newly established ministry to the poor, then awaiting a responsible head. The invitation to Hope Street, Liverpool, prevailed, however. Martineau was a contributor to the *Monthly Repository* while it was under the editorial care of Fox.

the vanguard. It was among the first to petition against the wrongs of deists, against the death-penalty for theft, against the oppression of woman, and to insist on national schools for both sexes. At a dinner of the Society at the London Tavern, February 6, 1833, the chairman, Mr. Fox, who had the poet Campbell at his side, and other literary men around him, in proposing the toast "Civil and Religious Liberty," said in the course of his speech:

"I look back with interest to the varying circumstances under which I have, from time to time during the last sixteen or seventeen years, proposed this toast. It has always hitherto had in our minds reference to some particular subject, which then was uppermost in our attention. Shortly after I came amongst you it bore in my ideas upon the endeavours which I was then making, and in which you materially strengthened my hands, to put an end to the prosecutions then prevalent against those who were not believers in Christianity. It was at that time that the celebrated prosecutions against Mr. Carlile and others were instituted. You then petitioned as Christians for those who professed their disbelief in, and hostility to, Christianity, and that the name of your religion might not be stained by oppression for religion's sake. Herein you acted up to your principles, and your efforts have not been thrown away; for if the Legislature has not altogether recognised the great principle which is the subject of our toast, such prosecutions have become less frequent, and have emanated, I believe in all cases, from private individuals, against the inclination of the

public authorities, and the sentences consequent upon them have been much less vindictive. After this time, about the year 1819, our views were directed by this toast to Parliamentary Reform, not under the aspect it has lately assumed; but as it appeared to us at the period when, by the Manchester Massacre and the atrocious Six Acts, it was attempted to silence the free expression of public discontent. A year or two more recently, this sentiment associated itself in our minds with sympathy for an oppressed woman (Queen Caroline). For one year at least we gave a magnificent testimony of that feeling by omitting the King's name from our list of toasts, to show that we would vindicate the rights of humanity, not only when any great public interest was at stake, but in whatever quarter they were insulted and outraged. Afterwards our toast referred more especially to the Catholic question, and it is with pleasure I remember how you uniformly refused to ask for your own rights individually, but would only claim them as linked with the rights of all who were persecuted for conscience sake. The times have now changed. This sentiment is not now, as heretofore, connected with any peculiar topic; it now associates itself with all the great questions to which the attention of the world is directed—it is now linked with every improvement, ecclesiastical and legislative—with every right that can conduce to that full measure of enjoyment which it is the design of our great Creator that man should possess upon earth. Our sympathies are now bestowed upon every country which is combating for its rights, and endeavouring to maintain the position which man ought to hold. We have sympathised with our friends in France in shaking off the yoke of a

monarch who ought no longer to reign over them. We are not, like the Edinburgh Reviewers, sick of hearing of America as connected with civil and religious institutions. You well remember how often her sons have mixed with us at these social meetings, and how often we have found delight in contemplating that noble country, with her broad rivers, her rich and yet uncultivated plains, her cities ever and anon springing up in her desert wilds—with the horn of plenty in her hand, and the olive of peace on her brow, and crown and mitres under her feet. With feelings the most expansive to all our fellow-creatures, and the most firm as regards our own principles, let us drink, 'Civil and Religious Liberty all the world over!'"

No man greatly moves men by his doubts, but by his convictions. Mr. Fox was not a sceptical man; he was a great believer. His emancipation from Calvinism was due to his great belief in the justice of God, and the unbelief of Calvinism in that justice. His further progress was due to mental fairness, incapable of maintaining a prejudice against evidence. But his ultimate attainment of his own real faith was due to a combination of inner and outer causes. He kept himself in healthy and genuine relation with the world by discarding the ministerial garb and airs. He cleared his mind of cant. In 1833 he ceased to administer the sacraments, and the trustees of Dr. Williams' Trust took back the communion plate they had lent to South

Place. Men who give others their own flesh and blood to eat, and the recipients of such communion, find sacraments turned into fossils—not bread, but stone. He desired to preserve the sentiment of old observances; for christening, he substituted "dedication," and for the communion proposed a friendly supper. In 1831 he purchased the *Monthly Repository*, the Unitarian organ, and took "Theology" out of its title, and took it largely also out of its contents. He had long contributed to this magazine, and in a remarkable series of anonymous articles, in 1830, had startled the Liberals with new ideas of religious comprehensiveness:

"There is nothing in the universe which is not strictly religious. Whatever isolates itself is superstition. All sciences are doctrine; all industry is worship; all laws of matter and of mind are God's will; all revelations of those laws are God's works; all devotion, goodness, and happiness have their best and broadest basis in the truth, that of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things." *

After he became editor he made good these ideas, and with the assistance of John Stuart Mill ("Antiquus"), Crabbe Robinson (who wrote about Goethe), Pemberton ("Pel Verjuice"), William

* Ebion Adamson's conversation with his friends, Barnabas, Elhanan, Philo, Caleb, Theophilus (1830).

Brydges Adams ("Junius Redivivus"), Harriet Martineau, and Sarah Flower ("S. Y."), who wrote charming prose articles—among others, a tale called "The Actress" (1835)—he made the magazine brilliant; and it is, I repeat, the periodical best worthy of reference to any one who would study the intellectual progress of England sixty years ago. He ceased also, as we have seen, to confine himself to Scripture lessons. Mr. Joseph Newton tells me of a discourse contrasting the cosmogony of Genesis with the revelations of geology, at the end of which, Mr. Fox, closing the Bible, laid a hand on either cover, and said: "Ah, my friends, do not let the range of your intellect be limited by the mechanical art of a bookbinder." Soon after, Sarah Flower's wonderful letter began that release, and Rammohun Roy helped to complete it. Harriet Martineau may have drawn his interest more towards large social, economic, and human questions, before which the petty issues of theology shrivelled. While the intellectual women by whom he was surrounded stimulated his zeal in behalf of the educational and other rights of women, the subject of marriage and divorce was pressed upon his attention by his own domestic unhappiness, which ultimately led to his living apart from his wife. On this question he held views now recog-

nised by civilised laws, but then regarded by most people as immoral.

Mr. Fox had dragged his denomination along. He states that there were attempts to neutralise his opposition to "infidel" persecutions, to his advocacy of Hindu missions, to his proposed domestic ministry for the poor, and to his liberation of the *Monthly Repository* from all sectarian character.* He was finally liberated from the sect by a tempest which, though personally painful, was really the means of giving this Society the independent position which it has since occupied. Into the details of that turmoil there is no need to go. The charges made against him speedily cleared away: Mr. Fox and his wife came together again in later life. But were I a believer in providences, I would regard that tempest, in which accumulated sectarian animosities against the leader found opportunity to spend their force, as a special providence. It not only detached this Society from all sectarian connections, but gave it the momentous instruction that it had a mission of ethical liberation equally important with its religious liberation. This Mr. Fox recognised. He had placed his resignation in the hands of the Society; after due investigation, its withdrawal was requested; and in withdrawing his resignation

* See *Monthly Repository* for 1833, p. 348.

(September 22, 1834), Mr. Fox, after expressing views of marriage now almost universal, added :

"When, more than seventeen years ago, I became the minister at Parliament Court Chapel, where this congregation then assembled, the only confession of faith which was received or required from me was a declaration of belief in the duty of free inquiry and the rights of Religious Liberty. That declaration ought not to be restricted to the investigation and profession of theological doctrine. Pulpit instruction, to attain any power of usefulness, must extend to topics of far greater practical importance than the articles of any creed. We must carry into moral speculation, into civil and political life, into the investigation of institutions and manners, the same fearlessness and frankness, and the same reference to great principles and ultimate purposes, that are requisite in theology, even though they entail a repetition with aggravations of the same results, in the imputation of bad motives or bad tendencies, the aspersion of character or conduct, and the interruption of that peace which is never advantageously preserved when it obstructs freedom of thought and speech, the promulgation of truth, and the progress of individual or social reformation."

Mr. Fox then lost the old Presbyterian wing of the Society, but it was only a small wing, albeit heavy ; he gained in its place a wing related to his genius. Robert Browning told me that Mr. Fox was a man of both genius and talent. "He used sometimes, too, to put out his talent to work for

him." I think the minister used to compensate his unprogressive wing with his talent for lifting the progressives by his genius. But after the secession his genius found a more sustaining atmosphere. In his admirable seven lectures in 1835, on "Morality as modified by the various classes into which Society is divided," new powers are found unfolded. He is less scriptural, more secular, more imaginative, more resolute. One after another his beautiful hymns were written; when they began to be sung I know not, but in 1841 the first part, and in 1842 the second, of his "Hymns and Anthems" took their place, and the old Aspland Hymn-book was gradually superseded.

Thus, amid pangs, came the new birth of our Society, which gave joy to its festival of 1842, the twenty-fifth year of Mr. Fox's settlement with it. On this their silver-wedding the Society, along with gifts, presented an address, in which they said:

"When juster views shall prevail of the duty of man to God, and of man to man; when wiser estimates shall be formed of life and of death; when in public the welfare of the human family shall take precedence of class legislation; and in religion, bigotry and intolerance shall give place to charity and love—then will be found foremost in the records of the wise and great, by whom those blessings have been wrought, the name of William Johnson Fox."

IV

In 1836 Mr. Fox had to economise his strength; he gave up the *Monthly Repository* to Richard Henry Horne in July (from whom in the year following it passed to Leigh Hunt). From this time the Sunday evening discourses were more frequently delivered by others; and on February 27, 1840, Rev. Philip Harwood, who had been occasionally heard, was invited to become Mr. Fox's coadjutor. Mr. Harwood, previously Unitarian minister at Bridport, had gained reputation by a sermon in Edinburgh, in which he rationalised St. Paul's conversion, causing his exclusion from St. Mark's pulpit in that city.* He was naturally invited here, and began with startling discourses on Strauss' "Leben Jesu." That famous work was not yet translated, and Harwood's discourses, which were published, first awakened

* This caused a secession, and formation of the short-lived Clyde Street Society (1839). Mr. Fox had (1823) dedicated the Young Street Society, which in 1835 built St. Mark's.

public interest in it. It is a fact characteristic of Mr. Fox's method, that though he had really taken away the basis of supernaturalism, the superstructure only began to tumble palpably under Harwood, whose heresy Fox had to defend. Relief from evening discourses rendered Mr. Fox's morning efforts the more effective. My friend, Mr. J. A. Lyon, remembers Mr. Harwood as "a very quiet, sedate preacher, pleasant to listen to, but not such as would induce me to come from a distance to hear him." He did not remain long, though he parted with the Society pleasantly, and for some time attended its dinners. He resigned the pulpit on September 23, 1841, having been engaged by the Philosophical Institution in Beaumont Square. But young Mr. Beaumont, not liking Harwood's theology, removed him, and he went into journalism. He ultimately became editor of the *Saturday Review*, and I believe held that position at the time of his death in 1887. Few, probably, in his later years recognised in the able editor, Philip Harwood, the heresiarch of 1840, who made even South Place shudder by his studies in Christian mythology. It was his six revolutionary discourses which set Miss Brabant to the task of translating Strauss' "Life of Jesus," a work which, on her betrothal with the author Charles Hennell (1843), she gave over

to her friend Marian Evans (George Eliot), in whose name, by her insistence, it appeared.*

In 1842, on Easter Sunday, came the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mr. Fox's settlement with the Society. The Committee prepared an address, already quoted, which was, I believe, written by John Forster, and finely engrossed. A well-filled purse was also presented. In his discourse on this occasion, shown me in manuscript by his daughter, Mr. Fox reviewed the history of the Society in his time, and dwelt on its reiterated affirmation of the one confession of faith with which he entered their service: "I believe in the duty of free inquiry, and in the right of religious liberty."

"The Society has continued to act in the spirit of the language thus employed . . . . And what is the Christian religion, as professed by this congregation, but the religion which has for its great and vital principle the duty of free inquiry, and the right of religious liberty? That is our Christianity. If Christianity be not that; if Christianity be at war with that; why the sooner we renounce it the better. But if this be Christianity, the

* Dr. Brabant, of Bath, whom I knew, gave £800 to found the *Westminster Review*. He was a personal friend of Strauss, and gave me an introduction to him. His daughter, whose second husband was the poet, W. M. W. Call (who wrote some of our most beautiful hymns), is still living. She translated Bauer's "Theology of the Old Testament," and a considerable portion of the "Leben Jesu."

longer and the more steadfastly we cling to it the better. Nine years after the date of the Trust Deed (1825), the interposition of some persons between me and the congregation—an interposition which the congregation appeared neither to require nor to relish—led to my announcing my purpose of retiring from my connection with it. That was prevented by a resolution of the congregation, and on this renewal of the relations subsisting between us, I again adverted to the original Confession of Faith on which that relation was formed. From that time to the present eight more years have passed, thus completing a quarter of a century since I first announced and formed the connection that has subsisted on the basis of that great principle. Twenty-five years! with all their changes—and they have seen some changes in the great world. Three of our monarchs since that time have passed to their tombs, and we are under the reign of a Queen who was not then born."

This re-assertion of the principle of liberty was probably elicited by the excitement caused by the discussion of supernaturalism, inspired by Strauss, begun by Mr. Harwood, and elaborated by Mr. Fox. He reminded his congregation of the labours and responsibilities of those who undertook to question and refute accepted opinions:

"And none, perhaps, but those who have actually gone through it, can well realise to themselves how much it involves—how much of patient toil; what diversified investigation; what sore struggles between old and new

investigations; between religious influences of different and conflicting kinds—all aggravated, perhaps, by external circumstances, by the censure of some and the alienation of others."

He reminded them of the fidelity of Winchester and Vidler, and said: "We may as well stop at the first step, as stop anywhere. A right of inquiry which is bounded, is not a right worthy of a rational creature." The few members lost by these new advances in rationalism were of slight importance, compared with the increasing hold which South Place was gaining on educated youth. Our friend Mr. Robin Allen, one of those youths, interested himself to obtain a further testimonial for Mr. Fox, and it resulted in the presentation of a silver vase on Sunday, February 19, 1843, in the chapel. About the same time the ladies expressed their affection and gratitude to Miss Eliza Flower by presenting her with an alabaster vase, which is now a cherished ornament in the home of our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Slack. I may mention, too, as an indication of progress, that at the great banquet in the London Bridge Hotel in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary, where nearly four hundred sat down, ladies, formerly admitted only to the gallery, sat at the table. It seems curious that the public-dinner conservatism, outlasting all other, should

have prevailed so long in a society which owed so much to women.*

To two women—Eliza and Sarah Flower—the Society owes a debt second only to that due to the eloquence of Mr. Fox. They were the daughters of the famous editor of the *Cambridge Intelligencer*, Benjamin Flower, who, for criticising the Bishop of Llandaff in his paper, was sent to prison. In prison he was visited by a sympathetic lady, whom, on release, he married. From such parentage, and with such traditions of radicalism, came Eliza and Sarah Flower, aged respectively twenty-four and twenty-six when their widowed father died (1829), leaving them to the guardianship of Mr. Fox. They were lovely, refined, cultured; their home at Dalston, nearly opposite that of Mr. Fox, was frequented by literary and musical people.† I have already quoted Sarah's

* The annual dinner, when I became connected with the Society, was mainly that of the Committee and a few invited friends, held at the London Tavern, It was afterwards given up for the annual ball. Mr. Fox liked to see dancing, though he does not appear to have ever danced himself. Mr. J. A. Lyon writes me: "At the close of the seventeen days' bazaar (Anti-Corn Law) at Covent Garden Theatre, the floor was cleared for a promenade. After a little speaking some called for a dance, which was carried, after much opposition by our Quaker and Puritan friends. Mr. Fox, speaking loudly, said: 'I am for free-trade in Hops! Clara Novello went to a piano, a violin was found, and dancing went on, our demure friends leaving the building."

† See H. Martineau's "Five Years of Youth." Mr. Fox's

reference to Browning, and his questions, which disturbed her early bibliolatry. He was then fifteen; in his twenty-first year "Pauline" was published; and in a letter of June 1833, Sarah, writing to her cousin Celina (Mrs. Edward Fordham Flower, of Stratford-on-Avon), says:

"Have you seen anything of 'Pauline'? I will send you down one of the first copies. We have renewed an old acquaintance with the author, who is the 'poet-boy' we used to know years ago. He is yet unmatured, and will do much better things. He is very interesting from his great power of conversation and thorough originality, to say nothing of his personal appearance, which would be unexceptionally poetical if nature had not served him an unkind trick in giving him an ugly nose."

The nose must have improved along with the poetry. Some passages in "Pauline" were, I think, inspired by Eliza Flower.* In their circle

birthday was observed by his friends; Sarah Flower for many years greeted the day, March 1, with a lyric. That of 1842 begins:

"Pour out for the Poet
Hebe, pour free!
Pour out for the Poet,
His pen it hath come
From the wing of an eagle,
And tells of its home."

* The first review of "Pauline" was by Mr. Fox in the *Monthly Repository*, April 1833. Mr. Fox introduced the poet to Moxon, who, however, declined "Paracelsus" (reviewed also by

Browning was cherished by the sisters (his seniors) as a poet and a friend. Eliza sometimes criticised his poetry; she did not like the idea in Pippa's song, "God's puppets first and last are we." In conversations with Browning I saw that Eliza Flower stood sacredly apart in his memory and homage. "She was," he said, "a composer of real genius." He could never speak of her early death without evident pain. In the year before her death from consumption (1846), Browning wrote to her:

"I never had another feeling than entire admiration for your music—entire admiration. I put it apart from all other English music I know, and fully believe in it as the music we all waited for. Of your health I shall not trust myself to speak: you must know what is unspoken."

John Stuart Mill was supposed at one time an aspirant for Eliza's hand; but she was the spouse of her art, consecrated to its ideal. Its steady realisation she saw in the sacred heart of the Society, whose every beat she set to music. The two sisters, with voices mated like their souls, sang in the choir

Mr. Fox, 1835). Browning wrote for the *Monthly Repository*, while edited by Mr. Fox, a sonnet (1834), and "The King" (1835), in "Pippa Passes;" in 1836, "Porphyria," "Johannes Agricola," and "Still ailing, Wind?" (See a paper on Browning in *The Argosy*, February 1890, by Mrs. Bridell Fox.)

there. Sarah, disappointed of her hope to become an actress, developed into a marvellous hymn-writer. Mr. Fox also, whose early lyrical power had been repressed by life's storm and stress, again rose into song. After he had ceased to use Scripture texts in his discourses, he loved to begin or end with some melodious verse born of his rapture. When his little collection of Hymns and Anthems—some of these, as "Light, light in darkness," written for musical themes admired by Eliza Flower—was printed, the tunes were already selected. Some of them Eliza set to her own music, others to compositions of friends, as Sophia Collett, or strains of Mozart, Spohr, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Hummel. When Mendelssohn visited England he made the acquaintance of the Flowers, and recognised Eliza's genius. Under the art of our friend Mr. Collet, then musical director, the choir reached unique excellence; the hymns were exquisite antiphones to the poet-preacher's harmonies of thought and feeling.

In 1834 Sarah had married William Brydges Adams, a friend of Mr. Fox, who wrote in the *Monthly Repository* under the name of "Junius Redivivus." She had, as I have said, an enthusiasm for the stage, which is shown in her tale in the *Monthly Repository* (1835), "The Actress," wherein

also, under the name Walter Brandon, may be discovered, I suspect, some portraiture of Mr. Fox. Her prose sketches, such as her account of meeting Charles Lamb and Coleridge, are all signed "S. Y." (*i.e.*, Sally), and indicate generous hero-worship; but it was in her hymns that she excelled. Her poem on the gentle martyr of Carthage, "Vivia Perpetua," is a sort of hymn. It came out of her heart and life. The remarkable letter she wrote to Mr. Fox in her twenty-second year, might be a preface to "Vivia Perpetua," and shows from what depths came such lines as these:

> "I could not live—couldst thou?—to feel a truth
> Cry loudly in the heart, and strangle it.
> Were this the end, no other life beyond,
> Better to perish thus, our dust unurn'd
> (So it might nourish still a living flower),
> Rather than breathe such breath as hourly kills
> The truth that blooms within."

But it is disclosed in this wonderful poem that Sarah Flower had not emerged from the shadow of doubt. Vivia says to Saturus:

> "There are some mysteries, I scarce begin
> To thread them but from out them up springs love,
> Flies through them like a bird along a grove,
> And sings them to forgetfulness, in joy.

But one e'en now doth come to hold her mute:
Oppression yet doth crush with iron foot . . . .
Our power is so much weaker than our will;—
But Love omnipotent!" *

Alas! this doubt was never solved. Sarah died in her forty-third year (1848), heart-broken at the death of her beloved sister Eliza, which occurred December 13, 1846. The sisters were buried at their old home in Harlow. Eliza's death was especially a heavy loss to the chapel. The Committee in their annual report paid their tribute to "one for many years so intimately connected with this congregation; the virtues and graces of whose

* Mrs. E. F. Bridell Fox, in "Memories," contributed to *The Girl's Own Paper* (July 19, 1890), describes Sarah's reading the poem to her sister and Mr. Fox, and some others. "I picture to myself the bright, sunny little sitting-room, with all the sweet scents of the old-fashioned flowers—the roses and clematis that struggled for supremacy in at the open windows—the added fragrance of the full-flowering old lime trees that stood in a solemn row outside the little garden, half shutting out the meadows that lay between us and Kensington Gardens, where the lowing white cows grazed all day. All the scene rises up before me. Inside the dainty little sitting-room, with its old-fashioned pink and white chintz curtains, and old black-framed engravings on the walls, and the piano filling up the tiny back room; while the rich expressive voice rose and fell with the thrilling emotions, until, in the scene in the prison between Vivia and her father, Mrs. Adams fairly broke down, overcome with the grief and trials of her own creation, and several of the audience sobbed aloud." (The poem was published in 1841.)

character endeared her to all who knew her; and whose compositions have contributed so materially to the beauty and completeness of the services in this place."

The memorial service for Eliza Flower, held in the chapel December 20, 1846, was long remembered —some still remember it. It consisted of her own music, and a prayer—no more—from Mr. Fox. Friends have told me of the minister's emotion as he arose and uttered the word "God!" then paused as if in an agony of struggle:

"God! with Whom are the issues of life and death; Whose are the sunshine and darkness; Who givest and takest away; and Who, ever holy, wise, and good, art to be adored in all; teach the heart to say, in filial submission and filial confidence, 'Not our will, but Thine be done!'"

It was, throughout, a pathetic prayer. Mr. Fox must have found this place too painful for a time, and presently (1847) made an effort to resign. He was now in Parliament (for Oldham)—where he first did battle for justice to the Jews, and then for national education—and in many parts of the country was doing valiant service for every humane cause; in illustration of what John Bright once remarked to our friend Mr. Lyon: "You Unitarians are very

useful for this world's work." The congregation had some thought of trying to unite his political and his ministerial work by removing to a "National Hall" at the West End. In 1844 the chapel had been thoroughly repaired, and the interior made somewhat less puritanical than before. The congregation then received an offer of £5000 for the place from the Devonshire Square congregation, and on December 29, 1845, a resolution to sell passed in Committee by a majority of sixteen. It required confirmation, however, and during the next year there was much warm discussion. Affection for the old place prevailed. (For the freehold, which originally cost £600, an offer of £15,000 was refused thirty years ago. It was always feared that the character of the place might be seriously altered by a change of locality).

It is impossible, within the necessary limits of these discourses, to give any adequate account of the tremendous effect of Mr. Fox's last labours in this place. They culminated in his memorable discourses on "Religious Ideas," which form his most important volume, delivered in 1849—discourses which anticipated half the "Hibbert Lectures" of our own time. In them his ministry flowered and virtually ended. They placed South Place beyond the reach of any reactionary influence.

In February 1849 the Rev. Newenham Travers

gave at South Place three lectures explanatory of his reasons for leaving the Established Church. His polished scholarly style and thought were grateful to the congregation, and he was at once engaged as assistant, Mr. Fox taking half the Sundays. Mr. Travers preached here two years, retiring at the close of 1850. In parting from him the Committee's report expressed thanks for his services, and "deep sympathy with the sufferings he has undergone for conscience sake."

Mr. Travers was a Scholar of Lincoln College, Oxford, and his discourses were of critical value. He was among the first to point out an error of translation in the Levitical law, supposed to forbid marriage with a deceased wife's sister; and also to prove that the Levitical laws could not be consistently adopted without adopting their penalty—death. Mr. Travers, who still lives (1893), resigned on his appointment as assistant-master in University College School, where he gained further scholastic reputation by his edition of Terence's "Andria" (1858).

In a sermon on "Inspiration" Mr. Travers left us a prophecy:

"Look for inspiration in thine own heart, and thou wilt find it there at last. The circle of thy vision, so small whilst thou wast bondman to tradition and the preacher of a narrow faith, will enlarge itself ever, till it

embrace in its range the interests of humanity; and thou wilt delight in no meaner labour than that which toils for the good of all, in faith of the great destinies of all, in recognition of the brotherhood of all, and of their equal filial relation to the God and Father of all."

The Rev. Henry Ierson was elected assistant-minister in January 1851, and was really the minister, Mr. Fox giving only eight discourses that year. The last he ever delivered were six in 1852.* Mr. Ierson, as I and others remember, was a worthy and earnest man, though reactionary so far as South Place ideas were concerned. However, things went on fairly well until the close of 1856. At that time Mr. Ierson claimed the right to act on the Committee, and the event resembled that which recently occurred when the same question arose.

There is a little history relating to this question which may interest you. So far back as 1818, during the organ dispute, the minister twice met the Committee. It is entered: "Mr. Fox being present, was requested to take the chair, to which he assented." But on October 21, it was—

"Resolved, with only one dissentient, that it is the opinion of this Committee that the minister of this

* In 1848 Mr. Fox lectured twenty-six times (£500); in 1849, twenty-six times (£350); in 1850, "three courses" (£300); in 1851, eight lectures (£100); in 1852, six lectures (£100).

congregation is not to be considered a member of the Committee, and that the peculiar circumstance under which Mr. Fox presided at the last two meetings should not be considered a precedent for the future."

Nevertheless, during the twenty difficult years that followed the Committee often availed themselves of their Minister's intimate knowledge of the Society's affairs, and on its reorganisation (April 5, 1837), adopted a government of six managers (of which the Minister was one) and two auditors. The Society had just been excluded from the Unitarian Association, and had to be thenceforth its own denomination. It required good ethical as well as business engineering. Nevertheless, Mr. Fox's presence on Committee was not without some friction, and was discontinued by him voluntarily; the last occasion of his appearance seems to have been on June 30, 1843. When, nearly fourteen years later, Mr. Ierson proposed to avail himself of this right, it was heard with amazement. The rule had so long been obsolete that its existence was unknown; and the congregation, on April 24, 1857, promptly repealed the rule by more than two-thirds majority, although such repeal involved, as all knew, the Minister's resignation. That indeed immediately occurred.

Notwithstanding this, Mr. Ierson's successor, Mr. Barnett, also desired to be on the Committee. The

Committee appointed a permanent Sub-committee to consult with Mr. Barnett whenever he desired, and thus put him in communication with the Committee. In reporting this to the congregation they said: "A nearer approach than this to priestly power your Committee will always feel it their duty strenuously to resist."

It is a congregational instinct to guard against ministerial, as it is a parliamentary instinct to guard against royal interference. A popular preacher could easily crush opponents in committee. My own practice has been to observe a tacit contract: never to interfere with the Committee's functions, and never let them interfere with mine. However members of this Society may differ on the abstract question, I hope it will hereafter remain abstract. It sometimes proves fatal to change the habits of age. The present custom of the Society was established a hundred years ago, was affirmed seventy-five years ago, and after one experiment the other way, has been thrice re-affirmed.

In January 1858, the Rev. Henry N. Barnett of Bristol was elected minister. He was an able man, and rather fond of experiments. In 1862 he compiled a supplementary Hymn Book, with psalms pointed for chanting. He also held services on Christmas Day, the ladies having decorated the

chapel for it—the first time perhaps such a thing had ever occurred in a dissenting body. This was generally welcomed. But all that could not recover the dwindling congregation. Mr. Barnett was connected with a Sunday paper, not remarkable for its piety, but in the pulpit he had an accession of aggressive piety, or even semi-orthodoxy; and finally desired to adopt the English Church Service, slightly expurgated. When this was smiled at, and his exhortations responded to with empty pews, Mr. Barnett, in his publication called "The South Place Pulpit," printed a letter to the Society, in which he resigned the pulpit and scathed the congregation. Alluding to his desire to sell the chapel to an orthodox denomination, in order to get rid of the "mountain weight of prejudice" against it, he said:

"I had a dream that it would be possible to build a new church, bearing a Christian name, wearing a Christian look, and solemnly consecrated to Christian uses. I am told that my Christianity is offensive to you. . . . It is urged against me that I preach all about Christ, and never about Socrates. I seek, however humbly and however feebly, to reconcile your sinning and sorrowing souls to the Lord God Almighty; you are intent, instead, on a career of iconoclastic adventures and exploits." (No. 21.)

The Committee of the "sinning and sorrowing"

Society—or of so much of it as was left—appointed George Levey, George Hickson, E. Braham, Henry Moore, a sub-committee to answer Mr. Barnett's letter, which they did very ably, especially resenting its fling at Mr. Fox. The concluding words of the Committee are:

"Now we have a comparatively empty chapel; and it would be strange, indeed, in this age of free inquiry, and in this free Church of ours, if it were not so, seeing that for the last five years we have had scarcely any other source of religion opened to us but records of the past as contained in the Bible. The daily heroisms of our own time, the martyrdoms of old, the great spirits of all countries and of all climes, have ceased to be called in to our assistance; and from our pulpit the rocks and the heavens no longer sing their grand hymn of devotion and praise."

Such was the hunger and such the famine of South Place in June 1863—just thirty years ago. The Society never drew so near dissolution. I remember after my first discourse here—I forget the date, but think it must have been about this time in 1863—Mr. Marsden told me there was some doubt whether they might not close the chapel. They engaged the services of very able men—William Binns, Joseph Barker, our friend Mr. Coupland, John Page Hopps, William Maccall, Hurst

Smith, Simpson, Whitehead, Washington Wilks, J. C. Street, Professor Newman. I used to come here and listen whenever I could, but it was rare to find a hundred present. I doubt if there were seventy to hear my own first discourse, and dear Marsden could only congratulate me on my "attentive" audience.

I did not preach as a candidate for this pulpit. I had come from America, in April 1863, on an anti-slavery mission, it being supposed that a Virginian abolitionist might influence public opinion here, which largely favoured the Southern Confederacy. I was the guest of the (Peter) Taylors of Aubrey House, members of this Society. My family was in America, and I was fully expecting to return thither at the close of the year. I was lecturing about the country, gratuitously, on the war, and had encountered the regulation mob in Free Trade Hall, Manchester. I also wrote much for papers and magazines. Circumstances induced me to remain in England longer than I had intended, and my family joined me in September (1863). On the breaking out of the war I had resigned my pulpit in Cincinnati, in order to devote myself entirely to the work of making sure that the war should terminate the cause of strife, Slavery. This being secured, and the war nearing its end, the old long-

ing for a pulpit had revived, and I was glad to form a temporary engagement with South Place. I had several times occupied the pulpit in the autumn and winter, and find, by record of the annual meeting, January 31, 1864, "it was moved by Mr. Newman, and seconded by Mr. Shuter, and carried, 'That Mr. Conway be invited to conduct the services of the chapel for the next six months.'"

In June the request was made for another six months; and then, at the annual meeting of 1865, my office was made permanent; the salary being fixed at £150, at which figure it remained for eight years.

I was just thirty-one, but a long pilgrimage it had been from my Methodist itinerancy in Maryland, a revivalist under twenty years, to the South Place pulpit. I came from sitting at the feet of Emerson and Parker, a passionate Emersonian, a devout Theist. My early law studies survived in a keen interest in controversies. I used to start from my home in Camden Town early enough on Sunday mornings to pass an hour at Smithfield. There, over the ashes of martyrs, orthodoxy and atheism used to struggle; and I, seeking to convert both to South Place salvation, played the part of Mr. Facing-both-ways, and was pleasantly pelted by both sides. But I learned a great deal on old Smithfield Common—not yet vulgarised by a meat market—as also under

St. Pancras arches, where I have fought many a battle for Theism; for supernaturalism I had long rejected, and the Christian name I was inclined to give up.

It is one of the most pleasant things in my memory that I reached England in time to know Mr. Fox. Though his strength was abated, the old fire sometimes kindled in his eye, and the sweetness that so long charmed his audience was still in his voice. I heard him, in a little Shakespearian company, read with impressiveness the part of the king in the First Part of Henry IV., the other characters taken by his old friends the Taylors and Mallesons. I told him of friends of his in America, and of the poet Longfellow's recollection of his first visit to South Place, where they were singing his "Psalm of Life" when he entered, the first time he had ever heard any poem of his sung as a hymn. (That day he went home with Mr. Fox to dinner.) Mr. Fox spoke cordially of him and other mutual friends in America—of Emerson, Parker, and, I think, of Margaret Fuller, whom he had entertained, though her I did not know. We conversed about the Chapel and its members, and the hymns—snatches of which he sometimes repeated. He was still a member of Parliament when I came, but was unable to attend, and retired in 1863. A beautiful and gracious old

man he was; his serene face, soft eye, flowing white locks remain a picture in my memory. But had I known as much of him as I now know, I would have clasped his knees.

Mr. Fox died at his residence, 3 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, on June 3, 1864. I assisted his old friend, the Rev. Mr. Malleson, at his burial in Brompton Cemetery. On June 12 we held a memorial service here, and my discourse on that occasion, printed by the Society, seemed to link me to the intimate history of this chapel.*

From the first I enjoyed intimacy with the Flower family, and from them and others heard so much of Eliza and Sarah that I almost feel as if I knew

* There were veteran Freethinkers and Radicals at whose graves I officiated—James Watson, William Lovett, the widow of Hetherington, and Mrs. Taylor of Frognal Lodge. Commemorative discourses, in most cases attended with memorial services, have been given here, under my ministry, in honour of W. J. Fox, President Lincoln, Cobden, Dickens, Maurice, Mazzini, Mill, Strauss, Livingstone, Sir Charles Lyell, Professor W. K. Clifford, "George Eliot," Dean Stanley, President Garfield, Darwin, Longfellow, Carlyle, Emerson, Louis Blanc, Harriet Martineau, Mary Carpenter, James Waterlow, Bishop Colenso. Lately some recollections were given of the late Phillips Brooks, Bishop of Massachusetts; and memorial services have been held in honour of Rénan and Tennyson. Of all of these, with the exception of Livingstone, Garfield, and Miss Martineau, I was able to speak from some personal knowledge. In but one instance—that of Napoleon III.—I felt it necessary to pass strictures on one whose career had closed.

Moncure D. Conway

them. All spoke of them as beings apart, as ideals imperishable. Mrs. Taylor of Frognal Lodge, a noble woman, bequeathed me in her will a portrait of Eliza Flower by Mrs. Bridell Fox, and for many years the lovely and intellectual countenance has been as a friend in our home.

But I can say no more now of these shades, so sweet, so noble, who have gently arisen and hovered near me while tracing their lives. Yet I do not part from them. Faithful ones, who made this place sacred, spirits touched to finest issues ; poet-orator of truth and love, who here enriched a generation of hearts with wisdom that abides with their children ; and you, the fair sisters, whose wedded music and immortal verse are still uplifting souls in all the world—in this your old home your spirit dwells : receive the loving homage of those who travel the paths you pointed—on, on, onward—in trust that, should we too in the future be summoned from our graves as witnesses, we may be found as faithful to our time and light as you were to yours.

The Chapel was burdened in 1863 with a heavy debt, which was finally paid off, five years later, by an anonymous gift. (It was from my large-hearted friend Mr. Saul, whose death was a sore bereavement.) The little congregation had a hard pull in those years. They could not give me much money,

but they gave me love and help; and the Committee brought in annual reports that made me blush. But the Society gave me more than that: it gave me freedom—not grudgingly, but with enthusiasm. Literature as well as religion, science, art, philosophy, sociology, history—the boundless continent of human interests was mine. Here I could freely, fully pour out my soul. What joy was that!

The Committee sometimes invited me to their council; and now, reading their proceedings, I realise how kindly they kept from me their difficulties and worries. Those ministers who have desired official place on the Committee were actuated by good motives; but if any future "preaching brother," to use Fox's phrase, incline to such office, I advise him to first read the Committee records for the past century. He will find them continually grappling with difficulties that could not have been discussed in the minister's presence, without sending him home with a headache and a heartache from which he would not return. This old gentleman had to be soothed, and that old lady to be conciliated, deficits to be met and all manner of worries, that would have deprived me, at any rate, of the peace of mind essential to literary work.

Of such anxieties the Committee relieved me, so far as possible, and in no instance was I ever dis-

couraged in what I thought best for the religious life of the Society. And I had to make some rather revolutionary drafts on the confidence of the Society and their Committee. Well do I remember the trepidation with which I once met the Committee on an occasion whose record is now for the first time seen by me:

"Committee Meeting, Tuesday, February 23, 1869.—Present: Messrs. Hickson (in the chair), Brabner, Cogan, Cunnington, Dr. Evans, Johnson, Levey, Moore, Rawley, and [James] Waterlow. Mr. Conway attended, and stated that for some time he had felt an increasing difficulty as to the composition of the prayer to be used in the service on Sundays. With the views now generally entertained at South Place as to the attributes of the Deity—as an All-wise and All-loving Father, who could neither be implored nor dictated into anything, and who could not change one iota of His wise and perfect laws for all the prayers of the universe—it became very difficult indeed to so shape a prayer, especially a public one, in such a manner as would be reconcilable with these beliefs in every particular; and although he had never expressed in the pulpit a word he did not believe, he confessed he had had to shape his prayers with much ingenuity, and should be glad to be relieved of the duty in future. Instead of the prayer he proposed to substitute a devotional reading—either of his own composition or of some eminent writer—and he felt quite certain that the service would gain rather than lose in warmth, earnestness, and devotion, by the change he proposed.

He by no means wished to take the attitude of saying he either could not or would not continue the prayer, if the Committee thought it was absolutely necessary, but he should certainly like to try the effect of the change he proposed, for a time at least.

"A general conversation ensued on the matter, in the course of which the feeling was unanimously expressed that the modification in the service might be safely carried out, and the Chairman was requested to inform Mr. Conway [I had left after my statement] that he was at perfect liberty to do whatever he thought proper on the subject, and that they would be glad to meet him and converse on the matter again in two months, by which time the plan would have had a fair trial.—[*Signed*] GEORGE HICKSON."

"May 14.—A conversation took place as to the change in omitting the prayer in the service, and all agreed that the substitution of the devotional reading in its place had been attended with thoroughly satisfactory results."

The cessation of prayer involved some distress in the little St. Paul's Road Chapel, Camden Town, where I had begun preaching the year before, in the evenings. By Sir Sydney Waterlow's request I had preached for that Society its first anniversary discourse, June 7, 1868, and this led to thirteen years of Sunday evening work with it. The devotional exercises, enhanced by the musical enthusiasm of Mr. Hill, were especially dear to them, and some left when the voice of prayer was no longer heard.

I remember that Henry J. Slack, an old son of South Place, thought, and perhaps he was right, that I would have done better to make the change at St. Paul's Road, without any argument. He advised: "In future, never let your pigs know you are driving them to market." South Place regarded the Camden Town Society with maternal pride. We presently passed there into the Athenæum, dropping then the name "Free Christian Church." We had the good fortune to be attacked by a shepherd of the neighbourhood, Mr. Glover, with whom your "wolf" had a long contention in the local paper. The Christian Evidence Society honoured us with a special course of antagonistic sermons. One of the clergymen made such a misrepresentation of my statements that the President of the Christian Evidence Society, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote me an apology which I published by permission, and was never troubled by the clergy any more, but treated by them with respect. If the clergyman had only waited a few years, when we had evolved a little more heresy, his accusations would not have been so far wrong. One of those preachers wrote me a private letter, entreating me, whatever my doctrines might be, only to call them "Christian."

With such imprudent agitations; with such trained Liberals as Alfred Preston and Alfred Squire; such

workers as Clements, Engert, Morton, the Hicksons; such helpful women as Mrs. Preston, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Edwardes, Mrs. Slack, Mrs. Squire and her daughters, Mrs. Tebb, Mrs. Crawshay, Mrs. Pocock—to name some of them—that Society could not fail to grow. Alarmingly! An effort was made to influence the magistrates, and make the licence of the Athenæum conditional on our exclusion. Witnesses were summoned, and one, who had occasionally looked in, described us as "seekers after truth, and a precious long time in finding it."

The Athenæum Society was still prosperous when, on June 27, 1880, I gave my last discourse there, finding myself unequal to the double work. But it proved a union of that Society with this, which has ever since proved fruitful. But I must now return to our earlier years.

An innovation of 1869 was the appearance of a woman in our pulpit.* This was Mrs. Bruce, wife of a Universalist minister in Yorkshire. Afterwards, I may here add, many ladies have occupied the pulpit; among them, the late Ernestine Rose, who gave us an account of Robert Owen, of whom she had been a co-worker; Elizabeth Cady Stanton,

* Since this discourse was given I learn from Mr. Fox's daughter that the celebrated Frances Wright (Madame D'Arrusmont) once gave a discourse from the pulpit in Mr. Fox's time.

since my neighbour in New York, the veteran advocate of Woman's Rights; and Mary Livermore, the eloquent Universalist minister, who did such grand service among the African freedmen in America during the civil war. The Society has also listened to discourses from Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Miss Helen Taylor, Mrs. Besant, Mrs. Ormiston Chant, and Mrs. Frederika Macdonald.

In the summer of 1872 the chapel was altered. The high-backed pews, ancient instruments of torture, were removed, and the high pulpit disappeared, with the communion table at its foot. Our chapel was built, as Henry Slack once remarked, in the time of the worship of ugliness. We have outgrown that, and have tried to get a little decoration. For a time our cornice was ennobled by the names of the great religious teachers of the world. After my time those names vanished; but, let us hope, to return at some happy era in more pictorial forms. I am always hoping for the rich man to enter here through the needle's eye—the heretical portal there—and make these old walls radiant with figures and scenes associated with the world's spiritual pilgrimage.

We have cherished here a loving relation with the religions of mankind. Mr. Thompson, whose munificence was manifested when the Chapel was renovated, presented an edition of our *Sacred*

Anthology to the Brahmo-Somaj of India—publisher and author resigning all profits. And on account of our Oriental sympathies I was welcomed by many Hindus in India, and by the Buddhists of Ceylon, to a large assembly of whom I gave a Christmas discourse on the Birth-legends of Buddha and Jesus. Twenty-three years ago, Keshub Chunder Sen visited London, where he and his friends had their head-quarters in the house of our treasurer, our beloved George Hickson. Keshub Chunder Sen's voice was first heard here, and repeatedly,—even in this Chapel, where, thirty-seven years before, the founder of Hindu Theism, Rammohun Roy, was first heard. And here, Sir Cumara Swamy, of the Royal Council in Ceylon, gave his excellent lectures on Oriental Schools of Philosophy. The Hindu scholar, Shankaran Pandit, who had come from India to attend the Oriental Congress, was announced to give a discourse here, but was suddenly recalled to India before he could do so. On the first Sunday after his arrival he came here, and some of us remember his most picturesque figure and costume. Immediately after my discourse, he arose, walked up the aisle, ascended the platform, and silently grasped my hand. I felt the warm heart of all India in that extended hand, answering again to the heart of South Place Chapel.

In Mr. Fox's time thinkers excluded elsewhere, whether holding his opinions or not, could find a hearing at South Place. So have been here heard Fanny Wright, Thomas Cooper, Joseph Barker, Dr. Perfitt. When Theodore Parker passed through London (1859), to seek health in Italy—alas! not found—a deputation from South Place waited on him, and although he was too feeble to accept their invitation to the pulpit, Mr. Marsden, one of the deputation, told me that Parker was touched by this tribute. South Place was the Society most nearly corresponding to his own in Boston, where Unitarianism now pays to Theodore Parker's dust the homage denied to his living presence.* To these

* But there were Unitarian ministers in America—Clarke, Sargent, May, Furness, Weiss, and one or two others—who did honour to Parker. When he was in London magnanimous Dr. Martineau and his family entertained him affectionately, and he met pleasantly the Rev. John J. Tayler and the Rev. Henry Ierson. Of course the Theistic circle rejoiced in his visit—Professor Newman, Miss Cobbe, Miss Winkworth, and Dr. Brabant, whose advanced years did not prevent his coming from Bath to see Parker. Among the friends who surrounded Parker towards the close of his life, in the South, was Mr. Edmund K. Blyth, of this Society, a letter from whom, written many years ago to myself, relating to that time, and repeating Parker's conversations, was read to the company which recently gathered at Florence to place a tomb (with portrait in relief by Story) over "the great American preacher," as he is described in the epitaph (written by myself). Parker requested that in any memorial service held by his friends in Boston our old South Place hymn might be sung, "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

traditions of hospitality we have been faithful in our generation.

Whilst American Unitarians in regular standing have been cordially welcomed and heard here—such as the Rev. Charles T. Brooks and the Rev. Graham Brooks, and the Rev. Robert Collyer—we have been able to assemble multitudes to hear those whose advanced views closed other doors against them. Two of the most accomplished American orators living—Octavius Frothingham and Wentworth Higginson—would never have been heard in England at all but for the freedom of South Place and the Athenæum. The Rev. Charles Voysey gathered his people here; Holyoake was heard here; I presided at the debate between the Rev. Brewin Grant and Charles Bradlaugh, though I agreed with neither; and here we unanimously defended Mr. Bradlaugh's rights as a representative when they were outraged by the House of Commons.

But there is no need that I should recapitulate history contained in the careful reports of our Society, which for many years have been printed. My aim has been to recover for you, from old manuscripts, journals, magazines, and from the memories of men and women, aged or dead, the story unwritten and inaccessible. But much is left untold that is necessary to do justice to our

Society—such as the Discussion Society, formed in 1877 by Mr. Seyler and others; the "Conference of Liberal Thinkers," which gathered here in 1878; and the many courses of lectures, beginning with those of 1873, when Max Müller, Tyndall, Huxley, and the younger Darwin were heard here, and extending to those on "Religious Systems of the World" and "National Life and Thought" (1889-91), which have added interesting volumes to the large literature printed by this Society.

I recall with happiness that Charles Darwin expressed to me his warm interest in South Place, as did Sir Charles and Lady Lyell, whom we often saw here; and John Stuart Mill and Professor Clifford. Alexander J. Ellis was a power among us. I had encouragement from many who, being themselves public teachers, could not attend here or anywhere. And when, in 1875, I went for a long visit to my native land, the array of eminent men whose services I was able to secure for this platform amply proved the value set by thinkers on this old London temple, dedicated seventy years ago to "the duty of free inquiry and the right of religious liberty."

And that reminds me of the only mournful event in my connection with South Place. While I was in America strong inducements were offered me to accept the place left vacant by the death of Theodore

Parker. Many friends and near relatives urged me to remain in my native country, and nothing but my love for this Society stood in the way. According to all usage, the facts had to be submitted to this Society, with an admonition that if they desired my return it would be necessary to give me a larger pecuniary support. They desired my return, and met me with a grand reception (March 27, 1876) and an illuminated address. But I was presently surprised by finding myself the centre of a quarrel, which ended in a small secession. I do not to this day know the exact cause of the trouble, but have ascribed it to a rival imported into the Chapel in my absence. That rival was the new organ. The organ wanted a grander choir with a larger salary, just as the platform did. At any rate, such is my impression; nor can it be denied that, under Mr. Keatley Moore, the music was admirable, so that it might fairly claim precedence. However, my indulgent congregation sided with this end of the chapel, and by their increased kindness rendered it impossible for me ever to leave this for any other congregation.

Then followed eight more happy and harmonious years. We tried to keep abreast of the growing knowledge of the world. There is beneath this Chapel a stone inscribed: "Sacred to the one God, the Father." But that stone was not our rest;

deeper than that was the aspiration that wrote the inscription, and went on singing "Nearer, nearer, my God," until the divine drew near in the genius of humanity. So we have really, though not literally, added another foundation-stone: "Sacred to the supreme Light and Fire: to Reason and Love in their struggle with Unreason and Inhumanity."

At length, after twenty-one years of work here, it appeared to me best to retire. It is better to retire when people say, "Why do you?" than wait till they say, "Why don't you?" I was anxious to do some work for America, especially in revision of its history and in criticism of its organic laws. The Life of Thomas Paine remained to be written. My sons were in America, and other voices appealed. I was able to leave here a flourishing Society, which could not, it seemed, fail to find some leader of the new generation to bear it on to larger life and fruitage.

But events concerning which I have no word to say, knowing less of them than you do, have brought me among you again. My literary leisure in America was broken up by tidings of trouble in this my old home: memories of the past laid hands on me. You called, and I am here. And though I cannot hope to do you much service, it will be found, I trust, something that we have together gone over the history of our hundred years. Let length of

years speak! You received the heart of my life; now age draws on, and not much more can I give; but in passing evoke the voice of a century to say to you, COURAGE! See how clouds have lowered, then floated into light; how divisions have sifted and sown the better seed; how, though things new become old, and young teachers grow grey, and theories wither, and our old liberty trees are storm-smitten, yet the true life renews itself, the golden fruit grows above our graves.

Brothers, this temple has hidden foundations—in human needs, in your love of truth and freedom, and of each other; in your hope and courage; in your humanity, your helpfulness, your sympathy: let those deep foundations remain, and this Society will never fall nor fail. And when another hundred years have passed, and our children's children gather here, they will listen to a sequel yet braver than the story now inadequately told on our first centenary.

APPENDIX

I. *Address by William Johnson Fox, M.P., given March 27, 1842, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his settlement with the Society.*

II. *A Summer Recollection* (1836). *Original Poem by Mrs. Sarah Flower Adams.*

III. *A Discourse on Liberty, given in South Place Chapel, September 17, 1893, by Moncure D. Conway, M.A.*

I

ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS*

"I BELIEVE in the duty of free enquiry, and in the right of religious liberty."

Such was the confession of faith on which I became the minister of this congregation in the year 1817. The declaration was publicly recognised as the basis of our union, at a preliminary meeting held April 2nd; and on the Easter Sunday of that year I entered on the discharge of my duties. "I believe in the duty of free enquiry, and in the right of religious liberty."

Seven years after that time, that is to say, in February 1824, the congregation took possession of this Chapel, removing hither from that in Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate Street, in which they formerly met, and in the discourse delivered at the opening of this Chapel I made, more amplified in form but the

* Printed from the manuscript by the kind permission of Mrs. E. Bridell Fox.

same in substance and spirit, a repetition of that confession.

"Christianity was a system of *liberty and liberality;* it was so as distinguished from Judaism, and Judaism was so as distinguished from at least the established forms of Christianity in modern times. No country has ever enjoyed more religious liberty than Judea. . . They had no established creed, no Tests Acts, no laws against opinions. Pharisees and Sadducees, the extreme sects of a later period of their history, and than which Europe scarcely presents wider extremes, mingled indiscriminately in the Sanhedrim, and arrived alternately at the high priesthood. Christianity came not to abridge this freedom. It neither abrogated the obligation, nor disproved the justice, nor changed the policy, of this principle of government. Its apostles went not to priests or rulers to deposit in their hands a direction or permission from heaven for forging and imposing a yoke which neither themselves nor their fathers had ever borne. Its founder did not proclaim that he had come to bind those who were free, and to preach a year of jubilee, not for slaves, but for tyrants, when, instead of universal emancipation, there should be a universal return to vassalage. Its servants were invited to own no master but Christ, and him only on personal conviction of his authority from God. This made them Christians, and gave them all Christian privileges and equal rights. They were then freemen of Christ, whose disposition was to 'give place to subjection, no not for an hour,' to imposers either of faith or ceremony."

As in the first instance the confession which I

made was accepted and responded to by the congregation, so also did it happen on the repetition of it: for, one year after this sermon was delivered, the Committee entrusted with the funds for erecting this Chapel executed their trust-deed, in which there is this provision: "As a place for the public religious worship of One God, even the Father, and for instruction in the Christian religion as professed by the said Society, at such times, according to such forms, and under such regulations as are now adopted, or shall from time to time be adopted by the said Society."

The Society has continued to act in the spirit of the language here employed. For, whom do we worship but that one benignant Power which is rightly invoked as the

> "Father of all, in every age
> And every clime adored,
> By saint, by savage, and by sage,
> Jehovah, Jove, or Lord."

And what is the Christian Religion as professed by this congregation but the religion which has for its great and vital principle the duty of free enquiry and the right of religious liberty? That is our Christianity. If Christianity be not that; if Christianity be at war with that,—why, the sooner we renounce it the better. But if this be Christianity, the longer and the more steadfastly we cling to it the better.

Nine years after the date of the trust-deed, the inter-

position of some persons between me and the congregation—an interposition which the congregation appeared neither to require nor to relish—led to my announcing my purpose of retiring from my connection with it. That was prevented by a resolution of the congregation, and on this renewal of the relation subsisting between us, I again adverted to the original Confession of Faith ["the duty of free enquiry and the right of religious liberty"] on which that relation was formed.

From that time to the present, eight more years have passed, thus completing a quarter of a century since I first announced and formed the connection that has subsisted on the basis of that great principle. Twenty-five years!—with all their changes, and they have seen some changes in the great world! Three of our monarchs since that time have passed to their tombs, and we are under the reign of a queen who was not then born. Since that time revolutions have shaken kingdoms. In France, a dynasty has been changed; in Spain and Portugal constitutions have been won, and lost, and won again. In religion and philosophy sects have arisen, and other sects have dwindled and passed away. New arts have sprung up. The progress of invention and discovery has gone on with ceaseless rapidity, with ever-widening influence; and upon those who were gathered together on that occasion, how strongly have fallen the lights and shadows of this changing time! How great have been their changes! Scattered from that

meeting? Why, their very graves are scattered! I have witnessed the death of one at what might be called a public meeting, a meeting of the Dissenting ministers of London. I have stood by the quiet grave of another in a remote village. Another sleeps across the broad Atlantic. While many have slept the sleep of death, others have died the deeper death of extinguished sympathy.

I have joined in matrimony, in this place, hands which were then infantine or not formed. The children of that time are the men and women of our day. The juniors have become seniors. The tide of generations has been flowing on. Chapels in which principles were professed similar to those then maintained have passed away, have been razed to the ground, or have gone into other hands.

Of the time that has since elapsed, two years, at different periods two entire years, were passed by myself in a state of sickness and inability for public labour, and by the congregation in one of patient and generous waiting. On one of those occasions a negotiation was opened between a Unitarian minister and an active member of the Committee, upon the prospect of a successorship to the pulpit, expected soon to be vacant. The aspirant to the successorship and the patron that was to have procured it have long been in their graves.

The majority of that meeting are not to be found here. The oldest of them, and some of the youngest, are gathered to the great majority of humanity. To

the greater number here the recollection of the events which I mention is as a tale of other days. Years have passed, changing what they could change, leaving what they have not and could not change, and now at their conclusion, on this Easter Sunday in 1842, here I am still declaring as I then declared that "I believe in the duty of free enquiry and the right of religious liberty." Were I to change a single word in that phrase, I am not sure that I might not be induced to avoid some incongruity of metaphor by substituting the "virtue" for the "duty" of free enquiry; but whether with such amendment or not (for it is of little importance as to the spirit of the expression), that sentence is, as it was, my confession of faith. Nor is it so indefinite a matter, or so vague in its relations to the influences by which thought is generated and matured, as some may suppose. It involves something infinitely more important than all the doctrines, or systems of doctrine, that have ever been put together. It implies faith in humanity. When we say it is a duty to enquire, we mean that we trust the mind of man, that its workings are to be relied upon, that it is not a thing possessed by an evil spirit, that it is not something alien from the truth of God; that its tendency to enquire is one which has ever worked well according to human experience, thereby giving us assurance that it ever will. If free enquiry be a duty (or a virtue) there is in man a tendency, an aspiration towards truth. His soul is an emanation from the great Power which is truth.

In the right of religious liberty we see the guarantee that there is no power to stop the researches of the human mind, that there is no higher right over reason, that there is no legitimate control to free thoughts, wherever they may find their way; but that they make take their course as rivers flow towards the sea, through wide and varied scenes of which they create the fertility and the beauty. It is in the human mind that we see all.

What is Deity? Let creeds tell us what they please, in phraseology simple or obscure—what is Deity but the loftiest conception of each mind? As high as each soul can get in its notion of the true, the wise, the good, the powerful,—that to each is God. All else is verbiage. This confession implies the recognition of sincerity as a paramount virtue.

"The duty of free enquiry," or "the right of religious liberty,"—what means it but that without let, molestation, or hindrance, without censure, aversion, or punishment, man is to think whereto his being tends? If with this right or this duty, there be interminable dissimilarity in opinion, in direction, in the course which various minds are led to take,—why, there is so much the more analogy to the outward constitution of the great works of nature, in which the widest diversities meet without disturbance of the general harmony. Nor can we, in the presence of that overruling harmony, repeat the confession of the duty of free enquiry without pledging ourselves to abstain from all subornation of insincerity in

language or in conduct, from all intolerance in feeling, in expression, or in action.

Sincerity, diversity, and the paramount importance of truth to our own hearts, thus combining together, lead us on to the assurance of human progress—of a progress which is best realised the more diligently and the more truly we profess the results of enquiries.

In making, now, the same confession that I did formerly, it may be asked, "How is it supported, and how does this congregation aim at carrying out the principle which it embodies?"

The reply to this is ready: a reply which it would be scarcely necessary formally to make in words, but for the sake of many, now present, who may not be acquainted with our ordinary mode of proceeding. I say, then, we work it out thus: As a means, not as an end. But as a means of high importance, this principle is wrought out by endeavouring to illustrate, to derive all the truth and beauty that we can from the scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. They are not cut up to serve the purposes of controversy. We analyse them not into doctrines and duties. We profess not to receive their sentences as oracles, whose words are to be repeated without comprehension, or to be submitted to under penalties, temporal and spiritual. But we endeavour to come, as far as we can, with fresh minds, to the contemplation of that great and glorious Book, which has been so disfigured, so darkened, so perverted by all the arts of conventionalism, and of which the world in

general knows so much more of the phraseology than of the spirit; and we endeavour to look at it as if it were a new thing in the world, at the same time not heedless of the venerable character and associations with which antiquity has invested it. We endeavour to see what its tendency is, what instruction it furnishes; in short, to enquire into what I have been endeavouring to delineate in the last five lectures delivered here, the philosophy of the New Testament, and as time and occasion serve into that of the Old also, that whatever may have been the purpose of Providence in raising that book to the pre-eminence, long enduring and widely influential, which it has enjoyed in the world, the same purpose, intellectual and moral, may be answered in our own minds. This we think is doing more real homage to the true, the lovely, and the grand, in the scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, than any set formal reading from time to time, or than any repetition of verses as if they were oracles.

In the most general statement of the object of these lectures and services, they may be said to aim at the culture of the capacities and powers of our nature, of the faculties of mind and heart of each individual. Their object is to excite the capacious powers that lie folded up in man, to call forth not only the energies of intellect by which evidence is weighed and truth ascertained, but also the taste and feelings by which good and beauty are appreciated, and the power of imagination by which the past and the future become

the great realities of the present, giving to it life, elevation, and power; in a word, to develop the whole human being, to stimulate self-culture, and to furnish whatever aid to that self-culture may be derivable from the resources of the teacher's mind. As this involves the philosophy of ourselves, as well as of the scriptures, it manifestly conducts us towards the general application of moral principles, and especially to their application to our own time. For it is in our own lives, and amid our own circumstances that religion is to be felt and morality to be practised.

Strange, indeed, is that system which lives so much in the past that it is almost dead to the present; which derives injunctions and motives of high interest only from bygone times and distant regions; which dwells earnestly on the fact that when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, Judea was taxed by Augustus Cæsar, but holds it almost profanity to allude to the fact of England being taxed by a Pitt or a Peel; which feels the liveliest concern about the massacre of infants in Bethlehem, but thinks little of the massacre of men perpetrated at Manchester. It is in their application to ourselves and our own principles that the worth of moral principles consists. And in endeavouring to work out this, the Christianity of the present day, it has been my object to have a religion, which, while it shall not lose its Oriental glory, while it shall not be less contemplative and imaginative than when it dwelt in its native towers, or looked up from those rich Eastern plains

to the shining stars of that brilliant hemisphere; while it shall be rich in the recollections of earlier times, shall yet bring its treasures to our homes, dwell at our firesides, walk with us in the streets of this our actual London, share in the business of the shop and the mart, note well the proceeding of the Court of Justice and the Senate, find its way to the prison and the poor-house, make its influence felt throughout all the complications of social life, and establish itself, not as an antique conventionalism, but as a sustaining and inspiring principle in which we live and move and have our being.

There is another purpose in perfect harmony with this, though, at first, the two may seem to be at variance; that is, to break the continuity of worldly thoughts, of the associations of our employments, to dispel the mists arising in the haunts of business, that, from time to time, the mind may breathe a different, a softer, and a purer atmosphere. For in multiplying the points of contact between the great abstractions of religion and morality and the humblest concerns of daily life, we do not give less, but greater, interruption and relief to the pressure of the latter, than can be felt under the oppressive influence of a faith and form more conventional. The ceaseless round of our daily functions requires to be broken. It chains the mind to earth. If high principles and generous aspirations be brought into contact with the details of our habitual toil, it is not that the lofty may be degraded, but that the lowly may

be exalted. It is to infuse into the latter more of dignity, of truth, of justice, of reality, of life, of hope. In harmony with doing this is the practice of calling from afar, from all the records of what the wise have said, or the generous and devoted have achieved, from all that history has unfolded of the great Providential plan, from all that study of the depths of human nature has revealed of the world in man's own soul—in a word, calling together what poets have sung, what philosophers have thought, and what biographers have recorded, and bringing these to bear, according to ability and opportunity, on minds doomed mentally to daily drudgery. Such influences coming at the intervals of occupation must be like gleams of sunlight, glancing in, from time to time, and spreading a lustre which may gild the whole course of life, and make it radiant with blessedness.

For that purpose all creation is our Bible. The stars above us with their poetry and mystery, and the earth with its forms of varied beauty, are pages of the same great work. The records of nations, civilised and savage; of humanity from the remotest periods at which we can get a glimpse of man; the history of opinion in all its changing forms; the collisions of reformation, the sacrifices for truth, goodness, and freedom—all these are our texts and chapters, and from these we draw oracles which elevate our souls with a divine power; and which make us to know more of God, of ourselves, of our duties, and of our destiny.

In furtherance of these purposes, and in endeavouring thus to act by direct instruction on the intellect and the feelings, we are not unmindful of the sympathy, the elevation, the power which is realised by consciously placing ourselves in the presence of the Infinite, All-pervading Spirit,—doing so, however, briefly; for what mind (especially in an assemblage of many) can long sustain such communion?

We endeavour, likewise, to give expression to our grateful, or confiding, or hopeful emotions, not in conventional phraseology, or in words which, having been long ago fitted to their framework, have become continually more remote from connection with religious thought or emotion; but by adopting in many cases the language of men whom God and nature seemed to have raised up to be high-priests of humanity, divines, poets, and philosophers—men who might have been chosen as representatives of the human race, and whose strains we may repeat as worthily embodying the highest aspirations of the soul; thus making the heart co-operate with the head, the feelings with the intellect, in carrying on the one great work of knowing and realising more and more of the True, the Good, the Beautiful, the Spiritual and the Enduring.

These are the means by which, at the present time, we are endeavouring to carry out our one, paramount, all-pervading principle of the virtue of free enquiry, and the right of religious liberty.

I know that a question may be put by those whose

recollection, like my own, can go back a quarter of a century: "Are you doing this, now, exactly as you did it then?" My only reply is, that I am not. But I trust I am not doing it worse, or less in the spirit of the principle which I took then, as I take now, for my guiding star. It may be said, "You do not take a text as you used to do." Nor do I. It has even been asked whether there were a Bible in the pulpit of the Chapel: a question which could not be put by any who attend here, and who know the purpose and manner in which it is not unfrequently referred to. But I do not use it in the old conventional way. Mrs. Barbauld said, fifty years ago, that texts had already dwindled from oracles into mere mottoes. The reason for them has ceased, but the conventional form remains, a sort of thing, or rather no thing but mere semblance, with which I have waged, and shall continue to wage warfare. I should hold it not respectful to any book, to a book infinitely inferior in worth to the Bible, to use it in that formal, unmeaning, misleading way. I do not, then, put forward a single passage or phrase as a text, because I would not be guilty of the practical falsehood of seeming to mean that on such phrase you or I rested, as a sort of absolute authority, from which there could be no appeal,—which in its meaning, indeed, might be perverted by ingenuity, and applied in a thousand different ways, as texts are applied,—but in its words was to be held as something sacred. Because I would not be guilty of this practical false-

hood, I have discontinued the form, not objecting to so much of it as may be involved in the practice of selecting, from time to time, passages for continuous exposition.

It may be said, too, "You used to administer the Sacrament at that time." This can scarcely be said in any way as a reproach by any person belonging to the congregation, for if they feel that to be a duty, or to be expedient, what hinders their own administration of it to themselves? Nay, when the rite was discontinued here, it was not discontinued till it was found that attendance at it was felt, not a matter of principle or conscience, but of more outward conformity to what was supposed to be expected. When I then set my face against its continuance, I declared, as I still declare my readiness, personally, to join any number of those who might think it good and useful to commemorate him who assuredly in what he taught, and suffered, and achieved, has well earned the right to a permanent commemoration in human hearts. But who am I that I should be called upon to represent Christ; to break bread as it were in his name; to affect a sort of resemblance between myself administering the bread and wine with those surrounding the table, and him with his apostles? All this seems to me a false and arrogant assumption; and it is only, I am convinced, on the most hollow and superficial grounds that the observance is maintained, in its present form, as an obligatory ceremony in many churches.

Perhaps it may be said, "You do not, as then, use the common dialect of the religious world; you do not uphold sectarian forms of speech, or endeavour to sustain sectarian creeds or sectarian connections." Certainly I do not. I have seen enough of them to have very little desire to do so. The best language that can be used for public instruction is the language of common life—a language that conveys our meaning; and not an Israelitish or Babylonish dialect in which the sense attached to the words is at once artificial and discordant, so that persons of the most opposite opinions may appear to agree by making use of the same phrases.

There is no doubt, I think, that if Dr. Priestley and Professor Sewell, the teacher of Puseyite morals at Oxford, had been invited to tell us what the Bible had revealed to them concerning the Deity, they would have recourse to very nearly the same texts, the same lists of attributes, the same phraseology about God. Yet the God of Professor Sewell is a Deity who "persecutes sin"—such is his own expression; while the God of Dr. Priestley is a Deity who has made sin in order to make more righteousness. It is evident that identity of words with such minds is infinitely remote from any identity of thoughts. Why, then, should a dialect be used of which common language knows nothing, that common language being itself amply sufficient to answer all the purposes of communication in religion, as in poetry and philosophy.

Then as to sectarian connections and the sundry advantages which they give, they remind me of what happened to my predecessor. Religious liberty in a sectarian connection is a liberty to go so far in your free enquiry as shall accord with the objects, purposes, regulations, and perhaps the worldly interests, of that sect or denomination. Thus much and no more. Go an inch beyond that, and your free enquiry becomes infidelity, or even blasphemy, and your religious liberty abominable licence. This congregation was formed originally on the principle of the universal restoration of mankind preached by Elhanan Winchester, and held by him and by it in connection with faith in the Trinity. My predecessor, Mr. Vidler, became Unitarian, and the congregation with him; and so far there was, no doubt, an exercise of religious liberty. In the memoir of him in the "Monthly Repository" of 1817 it is said: "In asserting Christian liberty, Mr. Vidler hazarded nothing with his flock, who had been obliged to learn this doctrine before they could become Universalists, and who were obliged to hold it up constantly in self-defence."

This seems all plain sailing. Here was religious liberty. Here was a congregation prepared, and, one might suppose, imbued, with the high and generous principle which they had already asserted in giving up one great doctrine of those deemed orthodox. In such a connection, with all the assurances of free enquiry and religious liberty which a sect can bestow,

Mr. Vidler preached a sermon against the doctrine of the Trinity. In that free and liberal society the greatest alarm was instantly excited. Many of Mr. Vidler's oldest and most opulent friends dissolved their connection with the congregation.

"His congregation, which had experienced some vicissitudes, was now in a high state of prosperity, and the growing number and affection and ability of the members might justly embolden him to rely upon an increasing provision for the decline of life; but his avowal of what was called 'Socinianism' would inevitably divide and perhaps disperse the Society, and deprive him of all opportunity of acting in the character of a Christian teacher. The 'Universal' doctrine was likewise spreading throughout the kingdom, and he was looked up to as the head of the rising sect; but all his influence would be in a moment annihilated by his abandonment of reputed orthodoxy, on its reception of which in its more essential principles the Universalists, no less than others, placed the salvation of the soul. Some of his most devoted friends, too, on whose liberality he mainly relied in the present state of his worldly circumstances, were peculiarly zealous Trinitarians, and these he should estrange for ever by the profession of the Unitarian doctrine, without the possibility, at his time of life, of gaining other friends to take their places. . . . .

"The first sermon in which Mr. Vidler explicitly renounced the doctrine of the Trinity proved that his apprehensions of the consequences were too well founded. Great alarm was instantly excited and many of his oldest

and most opulent friends dissolved their connection with the congregation, their secession weakened the bond of union, and the division which prevailed among the members who remained in communion in Parliament Court deadened the zeal of the Society and it appeared fast sinking into decay. The salary which Mr. Vidler received during the last year that he preached the Trinitarian doctrine was not less than £250: his annual stipend dwindled soon after to £30, and at this low point it continued for many years. This alteration in his circumstances deprived him of many comforts and of the means of usefulness, and necessarily threw him into a state of irksome dependence upon his private friends; but it did not quench his thirst after truth, much less destroy his spirit of independence. He continued to inquire and to study, and to communicate the result of his investigation to his people; often, indeed, doubtful of the result, but always relying upon Divine Providence, and determined never to relinquish his post while he could find the means of subsistence, and a sufficient number of hearers could be preserved to defray the expenses of the chapel."

Here was indeed perfect freedom of thought and opinion, a freedom which threatened to be the freedom of starvation!

When, a short time ago, I heard in some quarters that my late estimable colleague, Mr. Harwood, by his lecture on miracles, was going beyond the bounds of Christian speculation,—when it was very broadly intimated that if a certain authority continued to

exist in this Chapel, the lecturer would not have found much toleration from its love of free enquiry, or much emolument from the funds under its control,—why, I could not help going back to the case of Mr. Vidler. For if the anti-supernaturalist was to be condemned as renouncing Christianity, and was not to be upheld in carrying out his right of enquiry to the widest extent, the same condemnation was pronounced with equal justice upon the Unitarian. He denied doctrines which were universally held to rest on the same footing with what he retained. He went the length of a heresy which was not thought worthy of toleration, which was taken as the signal for the dissolution of a large proportion of his congregation, and he was fined for that opinion to the amount of £220 of his income, while the Universalists who so punished him, and who stood in a position exactly similar relatively to Trinitarian congregations, only applied the formula of intolerance which rigorous Calvinists had applied to themselves, "when you deny our tenets, you go beyond the bounds of religious liberty, and you are passing all legitimate right of free enquiry." We may as well stop at the first step of all, if we are to stop anywhere. A right of enquiry which is bounded is not a right worthy of a rational creature.

I have referred to the modes, which you are pleased to support me in adopting here, of public worship and instruction. I have referred to the period when the relation between us commenced. There are

many memorials of the years which have intervened, and were it convenient to adopt now, in this retrospect of a quarter of a century, the plan which I have on several occasions adopted at the commencement of a new year—namely, that of giving an analytical recollection of the lectures, with their topics and tendencies, which had been delivered during the year—I should have to distribute into several parcels a large mass of materials, entirely composed of sermons, or notes and memoranda for sermons and lectures, accumulated during that long period. If I were to make my retrospect by sorting these out according to their spirit and tendency, the first great parcel that I should tie up by itself would be of sermons on Unitarian controversy and doctrines. And a very considerable pile it would be, full of arguments and criticisms setting forth how much truth there was in a particular interpretation of this verse and that verse, and how much of usefulness as well as truth; and how little of either there was in another interpretation of the same verses.

This is a state of mind which is not only compatible with the great principle of free enquiry and religious liberty, but which is itself an exercise of it. It is an event in the history of any mind that has gone through it—the change from the Calvinistic to the Unitarian system of Theology. And none, perhaps, but those who have actually gone through it, can well realise to themselves how much it involves—how much of patient toil, what diversified

investigation, what sore struggles between old and new associations, between religious impulses of different and conflicting kinds, all aggravated, perhaps, by external circumstances, by the censure of some and the alienation of others.

Why, almost every sentence in the New Testament must have a different thought associated with it in virtue of that change. The humanity of Christ shines out, now, from a host of texts which before seeemed to prove his divinity; and the doctrines of Free Grace, Atonement and Satisfaction, what a colouring do they cast upon every page of the Scriptures! Modifying, as these notions do, the almost infinite details of thought and feeling, the change from them to an opposite system by one who has felt their influence is not an alteration of opinion, but a breaking up of the mind from one form of existence to cast it in another mould. It is an earnest effort by which this must be accomplished. It is free enquiry. It is, so far as it goes, religious liberty. The mind that has passed through it will feel this. It will deem itself to have escaped from a Bastille, and it will look with a somewhat exaggerated estimate on the evils from which it has flown, and the good towards which it is tending. It will accumulate all the vices of sectarianism in its notion of that sect from which it has retired, and it will reckon the transition from one doctrine to another as a renewal of spirit, when, in fact, it may be but a change to a different form of bondage. For where, in their effect on the mental

powers, on the heart and life, is the great difference between two systems, both of which rely on the verbal interpretation of any part of the Scriptures, and forbid the advance of reason beyond the limits assigned to such verbal interpretation?

Sermons of this class do not extend through very many of the years that I have spent in this Society. As a specimen of them I may refer to the volume of lectures "On the Corruptions, Revival, and Future Influence of Genuine Christianity," which lectures were delivered in Parliament Court at the beginning of the year 1818.

Out of the dissatisfaction with this verbal interpretation, out of the perception which had been generated that, in all this, ingenuity rather fabricated its own system from words, twisted this way and that, than got real truth from what it professed to consider the language of authority—out of this awoke the desire to go to facts rather than to words. A Divine Revelation in words and mottoes is a notion that carries some incongruity on the face of it. I once sat down to make a list of all the very words of the Deity that I could find recorded in the Scriptures. It began grandly. "God said 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" But it soon got entangled in such personal, local, jejune, trifling, and questionable matters that I gave up the attempt, stopped short in the list, and arrived at the conviction that there was more of the wisdom of God in the words of the man Christ Jesus than in all the recorded declarations of

the Jewish Jehovah. If not in words, then in facts. Such is the natural record of the mind. There is a mode in which the facts of Scripture are said to be identified with Divine Revelation. Facts are supposed to have been arranged for the purpose of suggesting certain doctrines, and such doctrines legitimately inferred from them are to be received as gospel. There is an explanation of this view in the first volume of the sermons entitled "Christ and Christianity."

"The revelation is *in the facts*. It consists of whatever theological propositions reason justly deduces from those facts. The supremacy of Jehovah is a revealed truth, for it is proved by the humiliation of Egypt and Babylon. The future life of man is a revealed truth, for it is ascertained by the revival of Jesus. Each is ascertained by the agency of reason on supernatural events which God ordained for that specific purpose. Reason, therefore, is essential to revelation, instead of their being incompatible or mutually limiting. Truth is revealed *by* the event *to* the inquirer. There was no revelation to the Jew or his neighbour who had the events but did not reason upon them. There was no revelation to the Greek, who did exercise his reason but had not the supernatural events for its guidance and illumination. The conjunction is essential."

In this view of doctrine derived from facts, while there is something to rest upon, there is also a tendency to send the mind farther. For the fact must be true, it must be supernatural, and it must be

certainly reasoned upon, in order to arrive at those results. Hence this system is apt to grow dry and husky, and it degrades the most beautiful legends of Christianity on suspicion of this want of authenticity. It forgets that since the world began, no miracle of material change ever matched the heart of man. It turns aside from the greater beauty of the natural to feed exclusively on the preternatural.

What is there in the parting waves of the Red Sea more grand than the ceaseless flow and setting in of the morning and evening tide? What is there in the earthquake rending the veil of the Temple more imposing than the mighty globe itself rolling in its course, and bringing with the changes from season to season the hopes of the seed-time and the gladness of the harvest? What is there in the Voice giving command to the laws of nature to stay their course, to the power shown in the good which every morning and every evening is brought by those laws in their unbroken and harmonious operation? The angel that descended into the pool of Bethesda to trouble the water, so that he who went in first was healed of his infirmity, was not a more lovely or more celestial visitation than the voice that speaks peace, love, hope to the troubled mind; that bids the turbid pool cease to stagnate, and the tide of time to flow sparkling on and sends the soul itself to hold on its way rejoicing, with renovated intellect, affection and energy.

This set of sermons being tied up and completed should be followed by another in which the natural

is placed more fairly on a level with the preternatural, in which it is seen that, not merely in particular cases, but all over humanity there is a divine influence, and that the obligations of a divine mission rest not upon a selected few, but upon all. The first sermon in the volume on Christian Morality* begins by declaring:

"There is not an element or an object in material nature, there is not a science or an art, there is not an event in history or a condition of society, there is not an intellect, or a faculty of intelligence, but what may be regarded as having a mission, and a divine mission too, for the accomplishment of the all-comprehensive plan of Providence. God maketh the winds his messengers, and flames of fire his ministers. It is the highest and the happiest state of an intelligent being to know whereunto he is sent, and to fulfil his mission with his might."

This third parcel of sermons brings us to the time when the present course of lecturing was adopted. I have already described its purposes, and I would rather have it judged of by the recollection of those who usually attend here, than by any of the reports of particular lectures that have been printed.

In thus exemplifying our conception of the virtue of free enquiry and the right of religious liberty, we pretend to be holding up no pattern for the world. We say not that this is a perfect model of a Christian Church, or of a philosophic society, or of public

* Published in 1833.

teaching. Our own circumstances and tendencies have led to it, and we avail ourselves of a hearing with the public more extensive than the teachers of religion or morality can usually obtain. We have nothing to say to those who adhere to other forms, or adopt other methods, except in peace and good will to let them pursue their own course, exercising the like forbearance towards us in the pursuit of ours.

I here close this retrospect, feeling that the endurance of a great principle throughout the whole period gives it a continuity which renders the retrospect so far satisfactory. Full of heart and hope was I when I stood among those, now so many of them dead or distant,—replaced as they have gone to the world of death, or have crossed the Atlantic, or taken up their abodes in other countries, by some who have come from those distant regions, by some who have come into the existence from which they have parted—full of heart and hope, I then made the declaration of faith in the duty of free enquiry, and the right of religious liberty, and I now repeat it.

"I 'bate no jot of heart or hope" in reliance on that principle, or on its power. My expectations have not deceived or disappointed me. The reality may not correspond in form. Realities seldom do correspond in form with previous expectation; but in its spirit, mine has been more than accomplished. The world has been making progress. I have looked on, and rejoiced to see that "man is advancing, led

by the Most High," individually, in the prospect of his enduring being, collectively, in the improvement of society, "to endless ages of joy and blessing infinite." For humanity I am grateful, joyful in what God has done for them. For myself, he has given me life, love, hope, immortality.

Blessed be His Name.

II

AN ORIGINAL POEM

BY

MRS. SARAH FLOWER ADAMS

PREFATORY NOTE

THE subjoined poem, now for the first time published, is printed from the manuscript of Mrs. Adams, in possession of Mr. Robin Allen, a friend of the poet and her sister Eliza.* The poem, written in 1836, is mainly a tribute by Mrs. Adams to her sister Eliza Flower, whose home at Craven Hill is described in the introductory stanzas. Mrs. Eliza Bridell Fox, to whom the poem was submitted, has written me the following reminiscences of the Craven Hill home and its circle, which she kindly permits me to insert here.

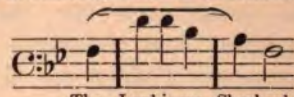
"DEAR MR. CONWAY,—You ask me what I can remember of the dainty cottage, so poetically described by her sister in the following poem, which Miss Flower made her home from 1835 till 1839.

* Mr. Robin Allen wrote the inscription engraved on the tomb

"They were five happy years of my childhood, so rich in recollections to me that I hardly know where to begin. My father being anxious that I should come under Miss Flower's pure and ennobling influence, her house was, to a great extent, my home during those years.

"To describe it literally, it was a cottage at Craven Hill, Bayswater, then a rural suburb. At that time London ended abruptly at Hyde Park Corner. Where the large houses of Craven Hill Gardens now stand, were the open meadows where the white cows grazed, and the row of sweet-scented lime-trees, and the elm-trees beyond, were all that

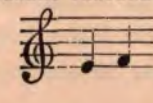
of Eliza Flower, at Harlow, which is as follows:



The Lord is my Shepherd.

In Loving Remembrance of
ELIZA FLOWER,
ELDEST CHILD OF
BENJAMIN AND ELIZA FLOWER,
WITH WHOM, AWAITING HER SISTER,
SHE NOW RESTS.
FINDING IN HER SPECIAL GIFT OF SACRED MUSIC
FIT UTTERANCE FOR HER NOBLE NATURE,
SHE WITH IT GUIDED MANY SOULS
TO GOD.
TO ALL SUCH HER MEMORY HAS ALTAR-
RAILS AROUND IT. THE LORD WAS INDEED
HER SHEPHERD, AND HER BELOVED PRESENCE
IN THE HUMAN FLOCK MADE EVEN
THE DESERT PASTURES SWEET.

SHE DIED
DECEMBER 12, 1846.



AGED 43.

intervened between us and the fir-trees of Kensington Gardens, just exactly as the poem describes. Our friends, the Novellos, resided in the next house, and the tall acacia-tree in their garden dropped its white and lilac flowers over the low ivy-covered boundary wall. The little front garden was completely shut in, and the big old-fashioned porch, covered with honeysuckle and sweetbriar, had seats on each side where half a dozen people could sit and read, or talk together at ease; while above, my blackbird, named 'Jetty' by Mrs. Adams, accompanied the talk below. Then, passing through the hall and out at the back, we looked straight away up to the Hampstead lanes, strewn with primroses in the spring, and over the large, untidy old-fashioned garden where cherry and apple trees flourished. In the summer school holidays, my brothers and I spent many happy hours ensconced among their boughs with the books that we loved. Once my father, in a merry mood, fastened up a great placard on a tree, inscribed for the birds' benefit, 'BLACKBIRDS MAY EAT THE CHERRIES HERE,' in consequence of our indignation with a neighbour who had shot some of those feathered poachers.

"My father had, at this time, chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields, in the same house with Mr. John Forster of the *Examiner;* but a room at Craven Hill was reserved for his especial use, and called his study; there he kept his favourite books, and there the selection of 'Hymns and Anthems collected from Holy Scripture, and the writings of Poets' was

arranged by him with Miss Flower's help. It still forms the first part of the South Place Collection, and most of the pieces were set to music by Miss Flower. The pretty sitting-room comes before me, with the chintz curtains (with their pattern of tiny pink rose-buds), the choice old engravings on the wall, among them a Saint John Preaching in the Wilderness by Salvator Rosa, the Raising of Lazarus by Rembrandt, and Michael Angelo's Allegory of Slander. The air was laden with the sweet scent of the roses and clematis that seemed always trying to force their way in at the open windows; while, mingled with the scents and the dainty forms, memory is pervaded with the recollection of the many pleasant scenes it witnessed—songs, and acting, and readings of many kinds.

"In this room must Robert Browning have read the MS. of his 'Paracelsus,' of which he wrote to my father: 'Though I am rather scared at the thought of a *fresh eye* going over its 4000 lines . . . yet I would give something to be allowed to read it some morning to you.' The reading of some of the 'Bells and Pomegranates' in MS. also, comes within my own memory when John Forster of the *Examiner* was present. I recall too Leigh Hunt's reading his play, 'The Legend of Florence,' which Macready afterwards produced. Miss Flower's delicate and unerring literary insight was highly valued by Mr Forster, who declared that he appreciated it even more than did my father, though that was scarcely possible.

"The dignified figure of Macready, with his kind grave smile, that lighted up his face like a sudden gleam of sunlight, reappears as one among the many of Nature's nobility who in that little room sat, mentally, at the feet of the fragile sylph-like figure, the Egeria of the place, Eliza Flower.

"I came upon the following sentence in a letter, dated May 1841, from Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Edward Flower, wife of her cousin the late Mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon: 'I never mean to love a house again . . . . after the loss of that open cage hung in the tree boughs, that the house at Craven Hill always felt like, with her singing and all.'"

A SUMMER RECOLLECTION

(1836)

'Tis pleasant—when the nights are long
  And days are drear and chill,
And hail and sleet are driving fast
  In downward desperate will,

Or when the choking mists around
  A gloomy influence shed,
When miry ways are underfoot,
  And drizzling rain o'erhead,

When hardened faces, graceless forms,
  Are hurrying all about;
(The coarser of the human clay
  That Nature fashions out),

When voices rude, in rattling street,
  Are sounds the chiefest heard,
When one would almost "give one's ears"
  To hear a singing bird,—

'Tis pleasant then to wander back
  Into the summer time,
And cull a bright and cherished flower
  From Memory's richest prime;

To bid a sudden sunshine come
  Where all before was gloom,
To say unto a barren heart,
  "Here shall a garden bloom!"

To open a remembrance sweet,
  Like casket rich and rare,
Fresh from the aromatic East,
  To extacize the air;—

'Tis pleasant?—Come and listen then,
  While March winds muster strong,
To the loveliest summer memory
  That ever lighted Song!

I see the grove of Limes, on a sunny summer's day,
'Tis stealing from their silky leaves the honey-dew away,
But the perfume of their tufty tassels clings to them around,
And there's play-room for their shadows on the un-molested ground.

The cream-white cow is dozing on her yielding bed of grass,
And the pony from the paddock-rail looks welcome as you pass,
And rooks and jays, from far-aways, come flocking now and then,
While peeping from her nested home is watching them the wren.

I see the acacia, myriad-leaved, and tall as it would rise
To the undivided azure of the pure and steadfast skies;
And the elms, in their rich quietude, their mystic depths of green,
That give the distant mournful firs scarce room for being seen.

Let us pass within the gate where the loving ivy clings,
And round about in graceful wreaths its changeless verdure flings,
To the porch where oftentime in the dewy April weather,
The blackbird and the brier try a match of sweets together.

For there, at daybreak until eve, this jetty dove will sing
'Neath the rosy-budded honeysuckle, opening to the spring,
And when autumn finds it mute, she munificently lends
Convolvulus and clematis for rich and sweet amends.

Pause! ere your footsteps try
The narrow boundary
That shuts the world without and all its folly!

As those who seek a shrine
Where dwells a saint divine
Themselves first dedicate from fountain holy,

To consecrate thy mind:
For Her whom thou wilt find
Summon thy whitest wingèd thoughts t' attend her,
Angelic tho' they be
Yet loftier were She
To show what seraphs are, the Heavens but lend her.

A wondrous alchemy
Hath power within her eye,
There in its lustrous depths for ever burning;
All dross beneath her sight
Is changed to living light,
The dark unto the bright for ever turning.

She speaks! List to the flow,
So tender-voiced and low,
Of eloquent thoughts that with the air are blending;
They seem to disenthral
From out the body's wall
The prisoned soul, and speed its upward tending.

Each music-breathing tone
Her voice hath made its own,
The fountains overflow—the eyelids glisten—
While as the rising strain
Sinks thro' th' enchanted brain
The very stars seem drawing near to listen.

The sunbeams love to come
And play within her home,
And lay upon her clustering hair their blessing;
The pleasant breezes woo her,
Like friends they whisper to her,
The flowers look up to greet her touch caressing.

Treasures of Art are there
In forms and faces fair,
All wistful to enjoy her hands meet placing,
Where light and shadow come
As in their parent home—
Her gracious welcome still their charms out-gracing.

Oft have we heard of cells
Where old magicians' spells
Conjured unseemly shapes and phantoms dreary,
While sounds of noxious things
Whizzing on baleful wings
Flitted about with mischief never weary;

Here, every sight and sound
A magic sheds around
In forms all beautiful, that o'er us hover;
Each bearing as a dower
Some bright ideal flower
To form a wreath wherewith the mind to cover.

A lovely band they come!
"Kilmeny"—(from her home
Unearthly wanderer)—an amaranth bringeth,

And Ariel while he sings
A shower of sweetness flings
From cowslip bells,—as on his way he wingeth.

Egeria calm is there
With olive-garland fair
Bless'd by Minerva for her sake, and thine—
Folded herself within
She listens to her twin
Teaching to man such laws as make divine.

And She whose lyric word
Did "magnify the Lord"
That He had bless'd her chiefest of her race,
Strips from her blossomed wand
A lily for thy hand,
Her pure deep eyes yet resting on thy face.

* * * * *

And when at eventime
Thou murmurest an old rhyme
To lull the o'erwrought nerves to charmèd quiet;
Soothing to downy rest
The poor toil-wearied breast
Vex'd by the outer world's malicious riot;

Sweet airs come one by one
To learn thy gentle tone
And grateful scatter perfume o'er thy numbers,
While sleep stands waiting near
A willing slave to bear
A wreath of poppies for the tired one's slumbers.

Night comes !—She seeks her rest.
Peace, fold her to thy breast!
And loveliest dreams unto her sleep be given:
The blessing she has brought
Into her soul be wrought!
On Earth there is no purer, brighter Heaven !

S. Y.

Bayswater, 1836.

NOTE.—"S. Y." (Sally) was Mrs. Adams' usual signature. "Kilmeny" (p. 157) was an ideal creation of James Hogg (the "Ettrick Shepherd"), in "The Queen's Wake." Kilmeny gets away into the woodland, and when she comes back "had been she knew not where, and what she had seen could not declare," but "hymns of other worlds she sang, in ecstasy of sweet devotion," and then disappeared for ever.

III

LIBERTY*

THE most effective political work ever written in Europe, probably, was Paine's "Rights of Man." Most of it was written in the Angel Inn, Islington. On that account I visited that place the other day. Of the ancient hostelry nothing remains: the house has been twice rebuilt since Paine's time; there has not been preserved from the old inn even a bit of furniture. Yet one thing has been preserved from Paine's time, and stands in the bar—a figure, about a foot high, classically draped, which I believe was meant for a goddess of Liberty. It struck me as of French origin, and I pleased my imagination by fancying Paine bringing it over from Paris, at the beginning of the Revolution, and keeping it on the mantel while he was writing the famous book. If the figure be indeed Liberty, her dingy condition in

* The whole of this discourse, as here printed, was not delivered at South Place, on account of its length.

the Angel bar-room is too true a symbol of our modern regard for liberty, as compared with the passion of Paine and his comrades, who saw in Liberty the supreme goddess.

While Great Britain was struggling to crush American independence, there was in this country an enthusiastic party of republicans. Their intellectual leader was an eloquent Unitarian minister, Dr. Richard Price, who preached at Hackney. He published such a grand defence of the American Revolution that Congress invited him to settle in the United States. But Dr. Price remained at his post in London. He corresponded with great men in Europe, among them with the famous philosopher Turgot. In a letter of his to Turgot he said: "I look indeed to the New World with satisfaction and triumph; and the time will probably come when a great part of Europe will be flocking to a country where, unmolested by spiritual and civil tyranny, they will be able to enjoy in safety the exercise of reason and the rights of men."

Turgot was not so sanguine, and in reply says: "I write you no more about the Americans; for whatever be the issue of this war, I have somewhat lost the hope of seeing on the earth a nation really free, and living without war. This spectacle is reserved for very remote ages." *

* "Je ne vous parle plus des Américains, car, quelque soit le dénouement de cette guerre, j'ai un peu perdu l'ésperance de voir sur la terre une nation vraiment libre, et vivant sans guerre. Ce spectacle est réservé à des siècles bien éloignés."

A few years later, America was free; there was every prospect that her African slaves would be liberated; and that from the New World republican liberty would spread through Europe. Lafayette, and other French officers, who helped to achieve American independence, brought back the torch of liberty to France. The Bastille fell, and over its ruins rose the beautiful dawn of Liberty. Dr. Price had grown old in years, but his heart was glowing with enthusiasm. A "Revolution Society," aiming at peaceful reform, existed in London. Before that Society the still eloquent minister preached at the Old Jewry, November 4th, 1789, and broke out with prophetic rapture about France:

"What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to see it. I could almost say, 'Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge which hath undermined superstition and error; I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever, and nations panting for liberty which seemed to have lost the idea of it; I have lived to see thirty millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects."

With this vision on them the old Unitarian orator's eyes closed in death: happily, he never lived to witness the league and conspiracy of despots against

France, fomented by Burke, executed by the younger Pitt, which caused the French Revolution to end with an epidemic of madness. For a century that Revolution has borne a brand of shame which should be more dark upon Royalism. Liberty was involved in that disgrace, and has never recovered from it. Just one hundred years ago, when this South Place Society was founded in religious liberty, the French Revolution was giving every kind of liberty a bad name. Its terror extinguished the aureola that America had woven round the brow of Freedom. The apostrophe of Madame Roland on her scaffold to the statue echoed through the world: "O Liberty, what crimes have been committed in thy name!" All over the walls of Paris was written the popular cry, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." The words remain on some public edifices to this day, and have become a sort of democratic shibboleth. It is supposed that these three ideals are related in some trinitarian way. In reality, however, Liberty and Equality and Fraternity are very different—even essentially. As for Equality, the term is ambiguous: there is legal equality, without which just government cannot exist, and there is a dream of social equality which cannot co-exist with liberty. For people are unequal in abilities and advantages, and if they are free will select the best society available to them. They will associate with those who can exchange advantages and develop their superiorities, with the congenial, not with inferiors. Such in-

equality is found among all sorts and conditions of men. Legal equality is steadily attained: social equality, or fraternity in any similar sense, cannot exist in a free community.

But there is a community that is not free—an army in the field. The social equality and fraternity impossible in peaceful or industrial society, may be approximated where masses of men are reduced to one and the same function, where they become, as it were, rifles, wear one dress, have one purpose, and are made comrades by common conditions and dangers.

The French revolutionists' dream of equality and fraternity naturally led them into the hands of a military chieftain—Napoleon Bonaparte. He was the one man who comprehended the inner forces of the Revolution, and read in them the meaning of Democracy. He saw that it was not a revolution for Liberty. The people—this is one of Napoleon's pregnant sayings—"The people do not care about Liberty; what they want is Equality. Those who care for Liberty are a few peculiar persons." In that discovery Bonaparte touched the secret of power over the populace, whom he organised into a single mass, a unit formed of equal atoms, obedient to his hand. So he ruled the French nation, and his ghost ruled it after he was dead, and is not laid even yet.

We must make up our minds to the fact illustrated by Napoleonism, however unpalatable. The mass of mankind are little interested in personal liberty.

It is a fallacy that revolutions are inspired by any popular passion for liberty. In the first place, revolutions are never made by the common people, but by the gentry. In the Congress that declared America independent of Great Britain, nearly every member was a wealthy aristocrat, and many of them were slaveholders. The leaders of the French Revolution—Mirabeau, Lafayette, Condorcet, Brissot, Robespierre, Marat—were of the aristocracy or of the gentry. There is a certain kind of freedom involved in all such movements, but it is not individual freedom, not personal, not human freedom: the freedom fought for is a freedom to change one master for another. When America had thrown off the authority of Great Britain, its citizens were still under authority. Individually they were not so free as before: they were subjected to a more rigid Sabbath, their theatres were closed by puritanical law, and they were arbitrarily compelled to support the revolution whether they liked it or not, or despite conscientious regard for oaths of loyalty that some of them had taken. It is a fallacy to suppose that in giving a country self-government, so called, you give its individual citizens self-government. My native State of Virginia maintained for fourscore years a self-government that meant slavery for nearly half its inhabitants, and a fetter on every mind that would protest against that wrong. What is called, variously, colonial self-government, independence of States, home rule, may be valuable on other

accounts, but it is misleading to associate them with human liberty unless they establish constitutions securing liberty from the tyranny of majorities. And the tyranny of a majority is the worst of all. You may deal with an individual tyrant, but not with a tyrant majority, numerically omnipotent, and ruling by patriotic sanction. All national independence carries the power to take away personal independence. Self-government in a State, as Mill pointed out, means government of each person by the rest; and real human liberty, that which man enjoys as man, is slowly and only measurably gained by charters, bills of rights, and other defences against the despotism of classes or of majorities, for a majority is a privileged class. John Stuart Mill was a true friend of the people because he told them the truth. He recognised their infirmity, their tendency to coerce individuals, and he predicted an increase of governmental invasion of liberty as the people acquired fuller possession of the government. "There is," he said, "considerable jealousy of direct interference, by the legislature or the executive power, with private conduct; not so much from any just regard for the independence of the individual, as from the still subsisting habit of looking on the government as representing an opposite interest to the public. The majority have not yet learnt to feel the power of the government, their power, or its opinions, their opinions. When they do so, individual liberty will probably be as much exposed to

invasion from the government, as it already is from public opinion."

Now I do not bring this as a reproach against the common people. Unhappily the larger proportion of them, in over-populated Europe, are commanded by a power stronger than Bonaparte—necessity. They are organised into an army fighting for life, physical life; the freedom they struggle for is freedom from want, for themselves and their families. Every man struggles for his own freedom; he cannot take to heart an oppression he never felt. What liberty is denied to the ignorant masses of this country? They are forbidden to gamble in public places, which they have not means to do; they must not publish or sell immoral books, which they are unable to do; they must not open workshops or theatres on Sunday, which they cannot do; they must not marry their deceased wife's sister, which they don't want to do. Where do they feel the pinch of oppression? Simply in low wages or no wages, and in restraints which prevent them, when on strike, from dealing with the situation on military principles. The strikers who try to prevent by force other labourers from working in their vacated places regard those men from the revolutionary point of view, just as we should all think of our countrymen who should help a nation with which we are at war. Is it to be supposed that people so enslaved by physical necessities can study and appreciate the problems of intellectual, religious, ethical liberty, affecting

persons and things totally unrelated to them? And when we pass to people free from physical want, but who by hereditary ignorance or fear are subject to superstition; who feel that their souls, and others' souls, are dependent on belief in certain dogmas; that the world would be wrecked by the failure of Christianity,—they too, are fighting for their own notion of freedom when they impose their creed on the schools, or close the museum on Sunday. They, too, are an army, acting on militant principles, and have no interest in the nice questions of religious liberty. They have all the liberty of that kind they want.

If in any department of human interests there are obstructions to liberty, they will be found only by people who are working in that department, and must be dealt with by such. And as we here are mainly concerned with the intellectual and ethical culture of mankind, it especially comes within our province to consider whether there be arbitrary obstructions to individual moral development, or to the ethical progress of society. And if this topic of Liberty appears to you rather threadbare, that is a good reason for reviving the subject. For political and social changes are so rapid that society is always passing into new conditions, all of which bear upon personal liberty in such novel forms that old principles require restatement in fresh applications. Society can never outgrow the ancient issue between liberty and authority. But authority, serpent-like,

slips from skin to skin; and liberty is prone to suppose that because one old form of authority has gone the thing itself has gone. I have friends in America who denounce the aristocracy of birth, but vote for the aristocracy of dollars robbing them with tariffs to swell the coffers of a class. I have some freethinking friends, there and here, who are still raging against an extinct Jesuitism, not discovering that the actual thing has slipped into a Protestant skin. It is well said that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty;" it must be eternal, because arbitrary authority is eternal. And the vigilance is necessary because it is impossible for any past victory of liberty to secure the next step in progress. During the American struggle for independence there were two men who, above all others, connected that independence with large human principles—Thomas Paine and his friend Benjamin Franklin. Those two men, principally, framed a republican constitution for the State of Pennsylvania. They resolved to secure absolute religious liberty; so they provided that no man, *who believed in a deity*, should be refused equal rights of citizenship. At that time atheism was unknown in America; probably neither Franklin nor Paine had met an atheist. But they presently discovered that their constitution, in excluding atheists, had obstructed liberty at the very point where it most required protection. Our liberal fathers went bravely as far as they saw; but "new occasions teach new duties;" to imitate their

courage we must add our eyes to theirs, and go as far as *we* see.

Now, one fundamental fact we can see which our freethinking fathers could not see, namely, that all moral or social progress depends on the freedom to develop differences. That is what the great discovery of Darwin taught us. In every step of physical progress, from the sponge up to man, we see a small difference of some organism from its species, and a long struggle of that difference to hold its own against the majority, and gradually develop a new species with its own variation from the old. Every step in the process was a battle for larger liberty, and had it been permanently defeated, even in a worm, man could never have existed. When man at length arrives, he renews the old struggle of nature on a higher plane; by differentiation, beginning with some individual, higher races of men were produced. Then by differentiation of religious belief larger religions were evolved. And so on with all the various developments, whose sum we call Civilisation. Every advantage that we now enjoy above our savage ancestors began with a struggle of some faculty or some principle to develop itself freely. Freedom to differ from the majority is, therefore, the condition of all progress, social, moral, and physical. And if this day any moral or other differentiation, in any mind, can be silenced and repressed by authority, or by the fear of it, it would involve the arrest of all advance in human knowledge, happiness and welfare.

In these days, when the humanitarian spirit breathes abroad like morning air, when the moral sentiment is largely charged with the enthusiasm once monopolised by religion, it is of urgent importance to consider whether these new forces are applying true principles, using scientific methods, or whether they are giving new lease to mere traditional notions related to discredited creeds.

It is certain that religious progress was for ages retarded by the legal enforcement of creeds, and there is like danger to moral progress, in the tendency of morality to invoke the law to regulate the private conduct of individuals. Of course the sole reference here is to strictly private conduct—that is, to conduct which directly concerns only the individual himself or herself. The law has no rational ground for existence, except to prevent one from injuring another or others; that is, from violating individual rights or public peace. The law has no right to make a man a slave; and it does make him a slave if it takes away his free will to regulate his own conduct in matters which immediately concern himself alone. The law becomes despotic when it interferes with any differentiation of conduct from that which the majority approve, and which does not impede the equal freedom of others.

It is claimed by those who wish the law to enforce their own private notions of what is moral, that every individual action does affect others, and that if it affects others injuriously, however indirectly

he ought to be restrained by force. It is true that individual action does indirectly affect others; but the law cannot justly deal with injuries that cannot be proved, or defined, or estimated. No such law can be applied equally. A person may seriously affect the happiness of his or her relatives by becoming a monk or a nun; a man may injure his neighbour's property even by opening his house for religious meetings; a man may injure others by marrying out of his station, or alienating his property, or emigrating, or doing a hundred things that might trouble them more than any private immorality, but which no one would dream of preventing by law. If the law proceeds on the principle of indirect and uncalculable damages arising from conduct, it cannot be applied to vices any more than to virtues—or what the majority deem vices and virtues. For men's vices sometimes happen to benefit others, and their virtues sometimes harm others. The pious and virtuous Roman emperors, like Marcus Aurelius, who sincerely believed in their gods, persecuted the Christians; the hypocritical often tolerated Christians through sheer indifference. The law cannot deal with inferential injuries, but only with actual ones; otherwise, to be just, it would have to punish not only the immoralities but all the moral actions whose ulterior results turned out bad.

Some of the greatest crimes in history have been done by law in the name of morality. Jesus was not crucified for any injury to others, but for what

appeared to the majority immorality. He violated the Sabbath, he violated the laws against blasphemy. He was, I believe, legally executed; but it was the law that was criminal, not he. His immorality is now morality. And since his time many a man has suffered in the same way, for alleged immorality, who injured none, and whose supposed vice is now deemed virtue.

Even were we to admit that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a law interfering with purely private conduct interfered with conduct really hurtful to a man's self, and indirectly to others, yet there remains the possibility that the hundredth case is that of a Jesus, or a Socrates, in whose moral freedom is involved the elevation of the whole human race. And all the possible evils of sparing the ninety-nine immoral men were more than compensated by the freedom of the hundredth—that is, of the moral genius whose new ideal, though in collision with the existing law, is the means of social civilisation.

It may be claimed that enough liberty is secured when people are free to announce new moral theories, and even defend conduct generally deemed immoral. As a matter of fact, pen and tongue are not free to deal with some vital moral problems, nor our drama free; but even were entire liberty gained for literature, that would not sufficiently secure moral progress. The world is not moulded by abstractions. There must be freedom of action, diversities of conduct, eccentricities, if the real potentialities of human

nature are to be brought out, and ethical evolution advance. Like physical science, social science must proceed by experiments. We do not want mere theoretical improvement, but practical and substantial improvement, in life, manners, institutions, in human happiness.

It is true that in moral evolution there is such a thing as reversion; in the exercise of freedom we incur the risk of decline. And this might be a very serious consideration if we had a social condition so satisfactory as to cause alarm at any change. But we have no such condition. The majority of people under our so-called civilisation are unhappy. In the commercial world there seems to be a decline of morality, largely owing to the immunities given by law to fraud, in freeing directors and trustees from liability. The virtuous law pounces on boys who play pitch and toss with their own coppers, but if they grow to be men, and gamble with other people's gold, and ruin families on a large imposing scale, they are pretty safe. So far as our moral order is sound, it is likely to be preserved by its advantages and by habitude, without any serious declension; but it is impossible, without greater freedom of experiment and discussion, to say just what is sound, or how much that is deemed sound in the social system may be really bearing corrupt fruit.

While believing that there should be less legal restraint in the direction of personal morality, I think there ought to be more legal restraint in the criminal

direction. The freedom of ignorance and vice to diffuse disease should be more restrained. Law should prohibit the free manufacture and sale not only of poisons, but of explosives, and weapons made solely to kill men—as pistols. Law should hold the property of every man liable for losses incurred under any company or enterprise to which he has given his name. Even for speech that incites to crime the law should hold men liable.

With regard to murderous crime the law itself is, alas, the chief inciter. While the law confuses the things most opposite, vengeance and justice, sanctions the assassin's method, preaches from Bible and gallows the savage impulse of "eye for eye, life for life, blood for blood," it cannot fail to cultivate the violence it should restrain; nor can its biblical code fail to propagate the crime which a scientific code would exterminate. For while superficial wits ask the assassins to set the example of abolishing the death-penalty, civilised sentiment, "maudlin" if you will, has largely nullified it, and turns the majority of murderers back into society to propagate their species. Nevertheless, even in its unscientific penalties legal procedure is the only alternative to private vengeance. For every man to be judge in his own case were social dissolution, a relapse beneath savagery, or even the animal herd. Violence must therefore be allowed no shelter under Liberty. Much radical wrath was lately excited in America by the new extradition treaty

with Russia; it was claimed that the tyrannicide is a political offender, and should be accorded asylum in a republic. But if an individual is allowed to constitute himself judge, jury, and executioner, all in one, he ought to be infallible and omniscient. When Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln he exclaimed "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" To the four million defeated slaveholders Lincoln the Liberator was a tyrant, just as much as the Czar is to Nihilists. It is said that a plot to assassinate President Cleveland was lately discovered. In every presidential election nearly half of the nation is defeated and humiliated, many ambitions and schemes overthrown, the chosen head of their victors incurring a vindictive hatred not unlikely to endanger his life. Were a third President murdered, and the assassin to seek asylum in Russian America, the people of the United States might understand better the necessity of restraining men from taking retribution into their own hands. All lynchers, all rioters, are tyrants: they are the worst enemies of Liberty, for they compel Governments to relapse from the civilised order into the barbarism of military rule. A man has freedom, with reservations as to occasions, to defend the general principle of tyrannicide, or of duelling; but has no right to incite to a particular assassination, or duel, or to the lynching of any person or persons; and if his exhortation can be proved to have caused or contributed to any special crime he should be liable as an accessory.

It is the special function of law to preserve the peaceful public order: that is the very foundation and framework of the social household. If we are to differ, to discuss, to develop diversities into improvements, we must have a country to differ in; if we are free to cut each other's throats about it, all civilisation is at an end, and the best hope were in a benevolent despotism.

There is this fundamental difference between laws directed to prevent crime—that is, injury of others—and laws directed to protect religion or morality: the crime is certainly wrong, and can be proved wrong to all rational and impartial men; but there is no such proof that the religion or the morality protected by law is true or right. The law may be wrong, the man punished for irreligion or immorality may be right. From immemorial ages the laws have been punishing as wickedness principles now known to be right. In departing from its legitimate sphere of actual damage of man by man, the law merely reflected popular superstitions which supposed that an offence to the gods would be followed by indiscriminate judgments of heaven on the people generally. So the law punished witchcraft, Sabbath-breaking, heresy, and other fictitious sins, in order to protect society from divine wrath. Legislation against immorality, or in regulation of purely private conduct, is a mere survival from the ignorant ages when legislators thought it necessary to protect the gods in order to protect society from their vengeance.

In every instance laws enacted to protect religion have turned out to be unjust and oppressive; and the successors to such laws, the statutes interfering with personal liberty and private conduct, are just as likely to be wrong as the pious laws. The pious laws retarded religious progress for ages by punishing each new idea as it arose; and there is little doubt that some of our statutes protecting morality are retarding the development of ethical science.

The word "liberty" is thought to be from the Latin *libet:* it is that which pleases. Related to this word there is another, with a significant history—namely, the word "*libertine.*" "Libertine" now usually means a sexually and habitually immoral person; but originally it meant a religious heretic. It acquired its moral connotation from the vulgar notion that the only thing that kept people from villainy was orthodoxy. But gradually experience did away with that notion; the unorthodox were proved as moral as the orthodox; and the original meaning of "libertine" changed: it long ago ceased to mean primarily a heretic. So also "miscreant"—literally a misbeliever—came to mean a scoundrel. The history of these words gives us a glimpse into the mental condition of those who punished heresy: they had no doubt that individual morality, and the whole social order and security, rested on the creeds. And when, with the advance of knowledge, heresy so increased that it had to be tolerated, the legislators, led by the clergy, deemed it all the more

necessary to prop up morality by severe laws—especially as traditional morality was largely based on theology, and under its prestige some theological propagation by persecution could continue.

All Sabbath laws, the law forbidding marriage with a deceased wife's sister, blasphemy laws, are clearly survivals from theological legislation; but the same despotic virus is subtly present in the passively accepted statutes for suppressing what is called immoral literature. It is my conviction that all such statutes, all literary and dramatic censorship, work more harm than good. A few obscene fellows are caught and punished; but it is not wise to tamper with the foundations of your house in order to get at a few rats. And the foundations of freedom of thought and speech are tampered with by laws affecting freedom whose application cannot be equal. No law against immoral literature can be framed which, if fairly applied, would not expurgate the Bible, and Shakespeare, and many classic authors. A law against indecent pictures, fairly applied, would invade some of the finest galleries and collections. Thus every such law involves the submission to some magistrate or jury, who may be ignorant of the subject, the circulation or suppression of productions that may be of especial importance to mankind. How many great works of genius have been burnt by the common hangman? Nearly every one up to the Reformation, and many after that. The suppression of several of Zola's works in this country is a

disgrace to the nineteenth century; it is not much less barbarous than the ancient burning of heretical books, and puritanical destruction of pictures and statues. This authority of a few particularly unfit officials to decide for forty million English intellects what they shall read, appears intolerable; yet even graver evils are involved in every existing law of obscene libel. Liberty can admit no libel except on persons. That some abuse freedom of the press by coarse publications is no more reason for suppression of that freedom than suicide is a reason for suppressing razors.

You may think the word "suppression" too strong, in this connection; and it would be, did we think only of the comparatively few books suppressed among the multitudes that teem from the press. But there is this important fact to be considered: nearly all of the suppressions relate to one kind of immorality only—sexual immorality—that is, to a subject involving questions on which freedom of treatment is most needed. No other portrayals of immorality are interfered with. The shop-windows may be filled with books of heroic piracy, daring brutality, prize-ring combats, drunkenness, and with pictures of such things; but no one interferes until something appears relating to sex. The word "immorality" is, indeed, commonly almost limited to this one meaning. And not without some reason; for sexual immorality is that which oftenest involves the welfare of others, thereby becoming crime. But on

that very account it is all the more important that intelligence and knowledge should be free to deal with this subject in its innumerable shapes and forms, instead of its being withheld from the light, with the practical result of abandoning multitudes to perils of which they know little or nothing.

This concentration of our dramatic and literary inquisition on a single subject implies far more than the suppression of a few coarse books and pictures: where it destroys one book it prevents a hundred from ever being born. Such law brands that whole theme as indecent; and the greatest genius, able to give the most important discoveries on the most vital of all subjects, physically and morally, might easily be silenced by the probability that his work might be called obscene. Moral science is brow-beaten, intimidated; the knowledge of sexual laws obstructed; the facts most important to human welfare kept secret; and by this suppression of real knowledge of a momentous subject the impetus of curiosity is given to the obscene dealer's miserable trade.

Now the laws practically interfering with private conduct, and enforcing on individuals conventional morality, must be taken along with the laws that suppress literature which the British Philistine deems immoral; and together they amount to a denial of ethical liberty—a denial which, so long as it lasts, must prevent any progress in sexual ethics, or in sexual science, corresponding to the progress in all

other departments of human knowledge and civilisation. For such legal restrictions on moral themes are felt most profoundly by the moral man, the responsible thinker. To a sensitive moral man, who reflects on the gigantic evils that would result from a general disregard of law, nothing can be more painful than the consciousness of having violated any law, even though he may disapprove it. Even if he could deal with this forbidden subject in such a way as to keep within the limits of law himself, yet he would hesitate long before he published any truths that might lead young people to form relations which might bring them into collision with the laws, or with social customs based on such laws, to the destruction of their happiness. That the moral genius of England is repressed by these influences is quite certain. John Stuart Mill's book on "Liberty" is, I think, the bravest defence of personal and moral freedom ever written in our language; and yet Mr. Mill has avoided the subject of so-called immoral publications. He knew by sad experience how eagerly his opponents would seize on and pervert every word, and pretend that he was encouraging obscene literature.

It is these profoundly moral thinkers, burdened with responsibility, who are silenced by laws restricting moral freedom. It is not the reckless, light-minded people, who do not care whether they violate the law or not, or whom they influence, that are suppressed. It is not the trader in obscene litera-

ture who cares about the law of obscene libel: it only raises the price of his odious wares. Every prosecution of his books is their advertisement, and the means of their diffusion. The suppression falls just where it should not—on the serious philosopher, who understands the solemnity even of an impolitic law; and who dreads to cast his pearls before the professional moral scavengers, though every pearl be the symbol of a social purity not yet realised.

Even if the statutes alluded to were as successful as I believe them illusory, for their special purpose, those advantages are too heavily paid for in the repression of ethical knowledge, and in their subversion of the principles of justice and liberty. A moral censorship of literature that cannot be equitably applied alike to the Bible, to Shakespeare, and to Zola, and to the cheapest romances, is an instruction in injustice; and the arbitrary claim to silence any man's thought or publication on a theory of possible and incalculable moral injuries is an education in intolerance. To question or disprove the dogma of a literal and eternal hell-fire may weaken moral restraints, for some natures, more than to publish a licentious book. Liberty, I repeat, can admit no libel but that which inflicts calculable harm. Apart from that principle, thought is abandoned to the arbitrariness of mere brute force, and no man can call his soul his own. Genius can only live by patronage, and enlightened religion sue for bare

toleration, until civilisation shall gain a charter of intellectual and moral liberty subject to no censorship whatever.

Let me remind you again of the wise advice of Wilhelm von Humboldt, in one of our lessons to-day. While affirming, in his noble essay on the "Sphere and Limits of Government," that "the State must wholly refrain from every attempt to operate, directly or indirectly, on the morals and character of the nation, otherwise than as such policy may become inevitable as a natural consequence of its other absolutely necessary measures" (mutual security and protection against foreign enemies), Wilhelm von Humboldt reminds the reformer in this direction that his task is difficult and delicate:

"Whoever would attempt the difficult task of interweaving, artificially, a new condition of things with that already existing . . . . must wait, in the first place, for the full working out of the present in men's minds; should be rashly cut through the difficulty, he might succeed, perhaps, in creating anew the external aspect of things, but not the inner disposition of human nature, which would surely re-manifest itself in everything new that had been forcibly imposed on it."

This centenary of the Reign of Terror in France recalls the often repeated evidence of this. The king's head fallen, up rises Marat; and Charlotte Corday's dagger laying low Marat, up rises Robespierre; and, indeed, the whole Revolution did but exchange